
Wynnegate Sahib

NOVELS BY
JOAN SUTHERLAND

THE GARLAND OF OLIVE
THE ENCHANTED COUNTRY
ADRIAN GREY
BEAUTY FOR ASHES
DESBOROUGH OF THE NORTH-
WEST FRONTIER
WINGS OF THE MORNING
CAVANAGH OF KULTANN
WYNNEGATE SAHIB
THE OUTSIDER

*(From the Play of that name by Dorothy
Frardot).*

HODDER & STOUGHTON, LTD.
PUBLISHERS LONDON, E.C. 4

WYNNEGATE SAHIB

BY

JOAN SUTHERLAND

AUTHOR OF
"CAVANAGH OF KULTANN," ETC.



HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LIMITED

LONDON

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BILLING AND SONS, LTD., GUILDFORD AND ESMER

Stack
Annex

PR
6037
5964w

Dedication

To

CANON AND MRS. HANNAY

THIS BOOK

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

Prologue

GERVASE WYNNEGATE waited till the door had closed behind the outgoing patient, then, letting weariness have its way for the moment, leant back in his chair and yawned extensively. He had had a hard day following upon a sudden urgent night call, and at five-thirty he had an operation of some gravity. It was just a quarter to four, and at four o'clock his hours for consultation were over, and he could snatch a much-needed rest and cup of tea.

There was still another patient to see, however, and after that brief minute's relaxation he pressed the button on his big Chippendale table and glanced at the name on the engagement tablet. It told him nothing, and he waited, his gaze fixed on the blue jar of brown and red chrysanthemums that stood close by, the flowers scenting the air with their fresh, half-bitter, half-sweet fragrance. Beyond the stretched silk of the window curtains nothing could be seen of the outer world save a dull yellowness that could scarcely be called light, and the room, being at the back of the house, was very quiet, with an air of comfort and even beauty of a kind necessarily sombre.

Books lined the walls in Chippendale bookcases of fine workmanship. The carpet was of dull blue felt strewn here and there with silken Persian rugs, the blue of a sapphire in their weaving; an old blue jar in a corner held four superb blooms of snowy chrysanthemums, and the few chairs were covered in golden brown hide.

The specialist's paraphernalia—fitted washing-

basin, weighing machine, surgical cases, and the like—were in a recess hidden by a great screen of old stamped Spanish leather, and there was no hint of matters gruesome or tragic in all that remained to see. Wynnegate had suffered no hardening in the years of his work, and considered the feelings of those who came for his aid as he considered his own. Meanwhile, the maid summoning the last patient had opened the door of the famous surgeon's consulting room, and announced:

“Mrs. Molyneux.”

Wynnegate rose and bowed as she entered, his grave eyes searching her face with the quiet steady look that was curiously comforting to those unfortunate creatures who sought him in mortal stress. Mrs. Molyneux was a stranger to him; a rather tall and very pretty woman, slender, fair, and exceedingly well gowned. She was, too, in a highly nervous state, as her hurried speech and restless eyes showed.

“Mr. Wynnegate, I have been recommended to come to you by—by a friend—a Mrs. Ackroyd, Cheniston Gardens—perhaps you remember? It is about my nerves; they are too dreadful. I am sure you can do something. I can't sleep. Doctors are so clever, and you——”

She broke off, and Wynnegate leant back in his chair resting his elbows on the arms and one hand lightly on the other.

“Yes?” he said gently. “I am not a nerve specialist.”

“You are a surgeon, I know. But you've a reputation for operations on the brain. And you must be able to tell me what I want to know. To begin with, I cannot sleep. And that is the brain, isn't it——”

Again she broke off, glancing nervously from side

to side, and there was a look in her eyes like the look in those of a startled horse, a terror, suspicion, helplessness.

"I am frightened!" she said at last.

Here was something definite. Wynnegate drew his chair nearer hers, his air of impersonal attention subtly changing.

"You must not be that," he said, and his tone, too, was different, no longer detached, but authoritative. "Fear is useless. It is worse, it is dangerous. Try to forget it, and to tell me as clearly as you can what has terrified you."

She had picked up a paper-knife, and was turning it restlessly in her fingers; now feeling his glance she looked up almost apologetically.

"I must have something to fidget with," she said. "It is so difficult to sit still. As I said, I can't sleep. Sometimes I don't sleep at all for two or three days. Then I dream—heavens how I dream! Senseless, horrible things—shapeless—like that verse in Genesis: 'Without form and void.' Those are the things I dream of. And, sometimes, I fall asleep just as unreasoningly as I stay awake, and it seems as if those violent happenings terrify me and I wake hours later worn out and heavy and frightened. There is nothing normal left in life. Everything seems distorted, unnatural."

Her voice was rising, and there was an hysterical tremor in the last words. Wynnegate left his seat, crossed behind the screen, and came back with a little crystal tumbler full of water.

"Drink a little," he said, "and take your time. There is no need for hurry or for fear. Remember that."

She took the glass and drank obediently. The ice-cold water steadied her, and she smiled faintly as she handed back the tumbler.

"I will try," she said. "I am trying."

"Good!" he said, approval in his tone. "That is capital. Wait a little before you go on if you like." She shook her head at that, however.

"No—no, I'd rather tell you everything. It's those dreams when I do sleep—and the things around me that are so dreadful. Everyday things. The streets, the very furniture—the dusk falling—it is all distorted and horrible. As if I could see behind the appearance of things to what they really are. And I can't go on, I can't!"

Wynnegate made a little gesture.

"One moment. I should like to ask you just a few questions. You are married—have you any children?"

"Yes."

"What are their ages?"

"The eldest is twenty-one, a son; the other sixteen."

He was writing rapidly as she answered, and spoke as he wrote.

"How long have these sensations you describe to me troubled you? Try to tell me as exactly as you can when you first noticed them."

She was making a great effort to be calm, and he noted it approvingly as he waited for her answer.

It came hesitatingly.

"First, soon after I was married, then when Torquil, my eldest boy, was coming. Just once or twice. Then they went, these dreams and sleepless nights, and they did not come back till afterwards, and then only occasionally, till two years ago. Since then it has been getting gradually worse and worse, till last Thursday something happened, and I decided to consult someone."

"Will you tell me what it was?"

"I don't know exactly. I had been at a luncheon party, and on the way home I met a friend of mine and I went to a séance with her. Lately I have been interested in spiritualism—it has seemed to help me—and I was much impressed, even excited. Strange things happened. I heard the voice of—of a friend who was dead—and it made a painful impression on me. When I went home my husband heard of our visit from my companion, and he was displeased. He hates occultism in all its forms. He spoke vexedly, and I grew angry. I have always been quick-tempered. Now comes the occurrence which terrified me. I remember speaking heatedly, furiously, and seeing his cold eyes gazing into mine, and then—I can remember nothing else. When I regained consciousness—for it seemed like that—I was on the sofa in my own room and my maid was with me. It was quite late, nearly dinner time—we dine at half-past eight—and when I opened my eyes I felt stupid and heavy and exhausted. She went to the door and called, and my husband came in, followed by our own family doctor—Dr. Lowndes, of 290, Berkeley Street. He asked me a few questions, and told me I had fainted. Hugh, my husband, stood by at a little distance and seemed very disturbed. Then I saw his hand was bandaged. He told me I had knocked over a great cut-glass vase as I fell, and it had broken, and as he lifted me from the ground he had cut his hand on a fragment. Dr. Lowndes gave me something to drink, and I went to sleep."

She broke off as if the effort at coherent memory was too much, and pushed her heavy furs farther from her shoulders, then moved impatiently and leaned forward.

"If I fainted why did I feel so exhausted?" she demanded. "And my head hurt me. That was

Thursday—no, Wednesday. And to-day is Friday—and I have not slept since. And the dreams have come just the same!"

Wynnegate made no answer for a moment, and his expression as he leant over his case-book was blank. The story, vague and indefinite as it was, told much to his practised ear, and his patient must not be further alarmed. He ceased writing after a moment or two, for she had risen and was moving restlessly about the room, looking at his books through the glass doors, smelling the earthy fragrance of the flowers, touching the ornaments on the white mantel-shelf.

"I should like to ask you just a few more questions," he said, closing the great book, "and also to listen to your heart a moment. Perhaps you would be kind enough to loosen your dress?"

She answered his brief questions quite quietly, gave him one or two details of information he required, undid the silk and ninon of dainty underwear to let him sound heart and lungs. She was painfully thin about the chest and upper ribs, but the heart was strong and steady, and Wynnegate laid the stethoscope aside and intimated the interview was over.

"I am going to see your family physician, Mrs. Molyneux," he said, as she fastened her things with slender, nervous fingers, "and, meantime, to-night, take this powder. You can get it made up on your way home. Do not go out anywhere to-night—cancel any engagement you may have and go to bed at ten. I will see you to-morrow at twelve. I have your address, have I not, on the letter you sent making the appointment? 397, Sloane Street. Yes. Now this powder will ensure you a quiet night's sleep, if you do as I say, and remain undisturbed this evening.

I should advise you to have a little dinner in your own room and to see no one."

She rose from her chair wearily, as if the interview had exhausted her strength.

"Yes, I will do that. And you will see me to-morrow? I feel certain you can help me if anyone can. Yes—if anyone can. Good-bye, Mr. Wynnegate, don't fail me to-morrow."

He saw her out himself to the waiting carriage in the cold fog of the street, then went back into the house and upstairs to the drawing-room. A pleasant room, all white and gold and fragrant flowers, where he dropped into a low chair by the leaping apple-wood fire and closed his eyes.

It was his rule to relax mind and body, and never to consider the details of his day's experience at this hour, especially when he had work to do later in the evening; but this afternoon he could not banish his last patient from his thoughts. He was a keen man, wrapped up in his profession and almost inordinately ambitious, and his sympathies were awakened both for the unfortunate woman herself and for her husband. He guessed only too well what story the family doctor would have for him, for in his own mind already no doubt existed as to the nature of Mrs. Molyneux's disease. For disease it was, malignant and pitiless.

Tea placed on a little table by his side proved a welcome interruption to his thoughts, and, unwilling to dwell further on the matter, he picked up a copy of *L'Illustration* and looked through it while he drank the fragrant Pekin.

The photographs of the autumn manœuvres were good, and he looked at them with interest, for he had studied in Paris and dearly loved France, yet all the while between his eyes and the printed page came the face of his last patient with its worn delicate charm.

Interest he generally felt, compassion always, but it was different from either in this case, for Mrs. Molyneux's face haunted, even as her tragedy shocked him.

He threw away the paper after a while and sat gazing ahead of him into shadows, frowning a little, thinking intently.

Life had been very good to Gervase Wynnegate, and he was fully aware of it. The elder son of a wealthy and famous barrister, he had taken full advantage of the chances his father's position gave him. To his father's brilliant gifts he added an almost fierce ambition which spurred him on when his wit and brains might have induced him to slacken his efforts. He spent four years in France, three in Germany, studied everywhere and everything connected with the profession he had taken up, and now, at an incredibly early age, held a position brilliantly won among the foremost surgeons of Europe.

He was unmarried, and he had never been seriously in love. His profession held the chief place in his life, and his brief leisure was filled agreeably by his many friends, and the one thing that attracted him strongly outside his work—a real and intelligent love of music.

He was rather annoyed by the persistence with which Mrs. Molyneux's personality asserted itself. In view of the doom that he believed to be in store for her, it troubled him; and after a while he rose in some impatience and went off to make his arrangements for the work ahead of him.

The cold rawness of a December night had closed down upon London when he arrived at the house where the operation was to take place, and, as he alighted from his car, he shivered in sudden distaste for the gloom—he, whom weather conditions seldom troubled.

He paused a moment to give some instructions to his chauffeur, and, as he did so, two men passed talking and went up to the door of the house, and he caught two or three words spoken in a familiar voice.

"My dear Lowndes, I admit all that, but Molyneux is a damned peculiar chap, and as jealous as—"

He caught no more, for the door opened, letting out a flood of light on to the pavement, and, even as the odd coincidence of names struck Wynnegate, the two men on the threshold drew back on seeing him, the speaker Dr. Bennett, his anæsthetist, the other a stranger.

In the house the latter was introduced as Dr. Lowndes, and Wynnegate remembered suddenly that the patient had expressed a wish for the presence of an old friend as well as her family doctor. Lowndes was evidently the man, and Wynnegate congratulated himself on the coincidence.

The three men stood talking a moment or two in the warm library; then the physician who had the case in hand entered, and they went upstairs together to meet a nurse on the landing. Wynnegate spoke to her, asking some question, and then went on into the bedroom, a pleasant place normally, cleared now and reeking of lysol, where the patient awaited him.

It was an abdominal case of the utmost importance; few other men besides Wynnegate would have attempted it, but his belief in himself was supreme, and his daring matched it. The patient—she looked very young, although she was thirty-nine—lying on the bed had insisted on being acquainted with the true state of affairs, and had grasped eagerly at the chance he offered her. Now, as he entered, she held out a hand to him and smiled.

“Good! I’m so glad to see you. I always hated waiting!” Her tone was as gay as if she welcomed him for some pleasure, and, as the others came in, she had a smiling greeting for each.

Suffering, hideous risk, long hours of suspense lay immediately ahead, yet she appeared gaily indifferent save for an interest in the whole proceeding that was quite sincere. Only for Dr. Lowndes, a gentle, white-bearded man of sixty, did her look change, and then it was only for the gaiety to deepen into a very sweet tenderness as he bent down over her.

“You will not forget, will you?” she said in a hurried undertone. “Ever?”

Wynnegate heard the eager question, though the reply was inaudible; that it was satisfactory was evident by her reassured smile. Then the anæsthetist came forward, the tiny sponge and mask in his hand, and Wynnegate took her wrist between his fingers.

“Are you ready, Princess?” he said, and she nodded.

“Quite ready, Mr. Wynnegate. Good luck—and thank you!”

He let his fingers slip to hers, smiled approval, and gave them a friendly grip, then he turned away to get ready, and her own doctor took his place.

Princess Wanda Tonelli, wife of an Italian diplomatist at the Court of St. James, herself a Pole of one of the oldest and most tragic families in that most tragic country, lay helpless, drawing in the sickly fumes with deep steady breaths, and Henry Lowndes, on the further side of the bed from Dr. Hughes, who kept his fingers on her left wrist, kept the right hand in his till it dropped heavily on to the bed, and held the beautiful brown eyes with his own encouraging smile till they filmed and closed.

Bennett spoke first. “Ready, sir.”

Wynnegate came across the room at the word, a sinister, overalled figure in mask and gloves, gave one keen look at the unconscious form, signed peremptorily to his assistant for the knife he wanted, and began. The task was a long one, and the air of the room grew heavy with the nauseating fumes as the operation progressed; the two nurses with trays and dishes, handed or received silently, and every eye save that of the anæsthetist was bent on the man who worked at such speed, yet with such consummate skill. The two doctors watched almost breathlessly at the daring which guided that hand, and in the tense silence Bennett's voice came with the suddenness of a shock.

"The pulse is weakening. She won't stand much more."

Wynnegate put out his hand mechanically, sparing one swift glance at the patient's face, took the sponge the nurse had ready, and bent still lower for one long minute. Then he answered.

"You need not give any more. I have finished."

Ten minutes later the patient had been wheeled away into the spacious bedroom at the back of the house, and the doctors, divesting themselves of the overalls, gloves, and masks, left the nurses to clear up the soiled linen with its sinister stains and all the paraphernalia of surgery.

Downstairs, in a luxurious smoking-room, Tonelli awaited them, worn-out scion of a noble house, smoking scented cigarettes and reading Baudelaire's Poems. A curious little gleam shot into Wynnegate's eyes as he entered the room and saw the husband of the woman he had just left, and his words were curt and few. Tonelli rang for drinks, asked a torrent of questions, and offered his abominable cigarettes. Wynnegate declined both and, with Bennett, left the house as soon as he decently could.

He was returning to Brook Street to dress, as he was dining out, and Bennett's only remark occurred to him several times as he bathed and changed.

"Why, in Heaven's name, did she marry him?"

The house where Wynnegate was dining that night was in Hertford Street, his hostess a certain Mrs. Sinclair, wife of a member of the Government. The distance was so short that he walked round, glad of the brief exercise, and heedless of the wet fog that clung about the streets. He arrived rather early, and received a warm welcome from his hostess, whom he had known from childhood.

"I'm so glad you came early," she said, when greetings were over, "because I've a friend whom you're to take in who will interest you most tremendously. She's a type. Very modern, very fascinating. Her husband's coming, too, and he interests me as much as I expect Enid Molyneux to interest you. Don't disappoint me."

"What did you say her name was?" he asked.
"Molyneux?"

"Yes, Mrs. Molyneux. Hugh Molyneux is at the Treasury. She's charming."

Wynnegate nodded. It occurred to him that he might be bereft of his dinner partner, but he gave no sign.

"If she has such a warm champion in you, Peggy, she must be charming," he said, lightly indifferent.
"I've heard of Molyneux. What is he like?"

"Cold. Horribly efficient. Proud as—need I say? Personally I would rather be married to an iceberg. It might melt. Hugh Molyneux never would. They are an oddly matched pair."

"Any children?"

"Yes—and how he ever managed to be human enough is a fresh shock every time I think of it. It's

quite improper. Talk of the gentleman I did *not* name just now, here they are. I hear Enid's voice." She sprang up—Peggy Sinclair never did anything deliberately—as the door opened and, almost before her guests had been announced, was welcoming the foremost with a little added touch of warmth in her manner. The next moment introductions were over, and Wynnegate found himself speaking to the woman whose personality had so interested him a few hours before. She showed no sign of discomfiture at being discovered in such flagrant disobedience of his orders, and Wynnegate equally gave no sign of any former acquaintance. They spoke briefly before he turned to Molyneux, whom Peggy Sinclair was just introducing.

He had been curious about the husband of this woman, and now saw before him a personality that was no disappointment. Very tall, broad of shoulder, yet of incredibly lean frame, Molyneux was rather noticeable to look at, with aquiline, finely cut nose and jaw, a close-lipped mouth and brilliant steel-blue eyes. He reminded Wynnegate of a hawk, yet attracted him on the instant, and as instantaneously Wynnegate thought of Peggy's judgment: "I would sooner be married to an iceberg. It might melt. Hugh Molyneux never would—" and knew it profoundly mistaken.

Whatever Hugh Molyneux might be his was no temperament of ice.

Two or three other people arriving simultaneously with the announcement of dinner, he had no chance of further study of this man, but in the dining-room, though at a little distance, he could observe him, and did so with interest. The party being small, conversation was very general, and his partner showed herself to be a brilliant and amusing talker; there was no hint in eyes or voice of the fear and horror that

she had confessed but a few hours ago. Therefore, it was all the more surprising to him when, under cover of the general murmur of voices, he heard her speak his name half under her breath.

"Mr. Wynnegate, are you very angry that I disobeyed you?"

He turned at once, meeting a look that gave him something of a shock. Instinctively, his tone was cold as he answered:

"I gave you my advice, Mrs. Molyneux. If you chose to disregard it, it is your own affair."

"I had to," she murmured. "Hugh was so angry . . . and I cannot bear that. It does me more harm than this"—she made an impressive little gesture—"can possibly do."

"I am sure you did as you thought best," Wynnegate replied non-committally, and would gladly have dropped a conversation that she was making markedly personal by manner and tone. She did not so wish, however, and refusing the dish the maid was handing, leant a little nearer to him and went on speaking.

"If you knew how difficult it is!" she said. "How impossible I shall find it to do your bidding—if only you could help me."

"Help you? How?" he said, rather unwisely.

"By understanding that I cannot always obey you when I would. By coming to see me sometimes—you are so sure of yourself, so sane, that I feel secure when I talk to you. Your very presence steadies and reassures me. I suppose I am talking very frankly. But I am not afraid of your misunderstanding."

For a moment he did not reply. A maid offering him salad gave him a welcome respite, and he took inordinate care in helping himself, for quite suddenly a most extraordinary sense of danger warned him. It was a feeling so unexpected and vivid that it startled

him out of his customary ease of mind, and when at length he found himself forced to reply, he spoke brusquely.

“It is a doctor’s business not to misunderstand.”

“Of course, but it was not altogether as a doctor that I meant. As a doctor you give me certain orders I am not always able to carry out—then you are angry. As a friend—”

He interrupted her almost rudely.

“I am afraid my profession keeps me too busy to allow friendships,” he said, and at that moment chanced to meet Molyneux’s eyes fixed on his face with a queerly suspicious light in their cold blue depths. Instantly he guessed the meaning of the uneasiness that troubled him, and guessing, felt it replaced by annoyance. Turning abruptly away, he spoke to his other neighbour, a young singer whom he had met before, and took her away from her partner with singular and rather blunt success.

He had to let her alone presently and devote his attention to Mrs. Molyneux, but this time he kept the conversation, if such it could be called, in his own hand, and took care that she had no opportunity of carrying it into personal regions. Mrs. Sinclair detested the “sheep-and-goats” division, and in her house everyone rose from the table together, so that there was no opportunity for him to talk to Molyneux, even had he so wished, and about half-past ten, on the plea of work still to do, he took his leave and swung out into the cold dark of the December night.

There were letters to write and answer when he reached home, and proofs of an article for the *Lancet*, to correct, and he speedily forgot Mrs. Molyneux in the busy two hours that intervened before he went to bed.

The following day his early appointment with Dr.

Lowndes was postponed by that good man's sudden indisposition—an annoying delay in view of the peculiar circumstances of the case. However, he telephoned to Mrs. Molyneux, and the day following, at one o'clock, after his visit to the hospital, set out to walk to Sloane Street, such was the temptation of the weather, for the raw fog of the previous days had cleared off, and a sky of frosty blue with clear sunshine made London a pleasant place. The trees in the park were bare, the tan crisped with frost under the horses' hoofs, and the air was keen and exhilarating.

His car would follow him, but the prospect of the sharp exercise was too alluring, and he threw aside the odd depression that had weighed so unaccountably on his spirits for the last twenty-four hours and enjoyed every moment of his walk. After all, so he reasoned, such depression was the height of folly. Young, successful, already very fairly well off, and with no responsibilities outside those of his profession, what possible disaster could befall him?

He had absolute confidence in himself, and his rapid success had strengthened a pride that had always been considerable. Secure in that belief he tempted Fate.

The exterior of the house in Sloane Street was pleasant, with white-painted windows and a white door ornamented with a heavy silver knocker; within the square hall gay chintz curtains at a half-landing window, the gleam of old brass and the soft tones of old oak made an effect almost countrylike, which impressed Wynnegate very favourably. He was shown into the drawing-room, and there, on the threshold, met a young girl who was just coming out.

He had a momentary impression of slim awkwardness, of pale, sharp features made plainer by the severity of the dark hair's dressing and dusky eyes

full of an odd resentment. If that were Mrs. Molyneux's daughter she bore little enough resemblance to her pretty mother, and he was faintly surprised at the girl's plainness as she slipped past him and vanished upstairs. One or two photographs stood about the room, and as he waited impatiently enough—he was not accustomed to being kept waiting—he sauntered round looking at them. Yes, that was undoubtedly the daughter, for there was a portrait of her, younger and plainer still, placed next to one of her mother—a rather cruel contrast. Heavens, what a sulky, unattractive-looking child! Then he straightway forgot all about her, for the maid reappeared and conducted him upstairs to the patient he so little desired to see. Enid Molyneux was in bed, a dainty figure all lace and ninon, in a room full of luxury and delicate colour. The memory of that other room seen only last night flashed into his mind. That room all stripped and dismantled; its beauty gone save for the jewel its sterilised walls enclosed. Then he had looked on one of the most exquisite faces he had ever seen unaided by any adornment whatsoever; now he saw a woman with every delicate art added to an attractiveness that was as remote from real beauty as the east from the west. For she was attractive, he admitted that frankly enough, not only with that curious attraction of the degenerate, but by reason of her general personality. Her excessive pallor had gone, the ashen fairness of her hair was softened by the exquisite lace of the winged cap she wore, her lips were less startlingly red, and her expression was softer than he had seen it. She held out a hand to welcome him, signed the maid to leave, and spoke in a low voice.

“It is very good of you to come when you are so busy, especially when I disobeyed you the night before last.”

" You found it impossible to follow my advice," he said, " but you will do so now, I am sure. Dr. Lowndes, as you know, is indisposed, so our consultation is postponed for a day or two, but you will see Dr. Salmon, as I suggested ?"

Mrs. Molyneux moved restlessly.

" I met Dr. Salmon once—at a dance. I didn't like him. Why do you insist ?"

" Your nerves are out of order. You don't sleep. When you do you are troubled with hideous dreams. He is the man for you to consult."

" But surely you can do all he can. You can prescribe for me. You could tell me what to take—though I've tried most things."

He looked at her sharply.

" What have you tried ?"

" Long ago bromide—that was quite useless. Chlorodyne—veronal. Don't look so surprised. Veronal doesn't hurt me, and I take it very seldom."

" It's about the worst thing you can take," he said. " Drugs are poison to you. It's in your daily life you need help. You're too restless, too excitable. Excitement of any kind is bad. Can't you go away from town and take life quietly for a while ?"

" I hate quiet," she said, petulance in tone and face. " I should go mad if I had to live in the country—fog and mud all the winter, varied by deadly dinner parties for the neighbours, and dust and midges all the summer. My tastes are not bucolic."

" You want me to prescribe for you, and yet you refuse to take my advice. Any nerve specialist you go to will not be so lenient."

" Why should I go to anyone else ? You can do me more good than all the other doctors in London. Don't you care about my health that you want to hand me over at once to someone else ?"

" Immensely. That is why I am doing it. I am a surgeon, not a consulting physician."

Moving a little, she threw out her hand with a gesture of appeal.

" Then, for Heaven's sake don't desert me. Yes, I'll admit it. I *am* ill, and I am ill because I am desperately unhappy. My husband—"

" Please!" Half rising, he made a movement of protest. " Don't tell me things you do not really wish to say. If you are unhappy it is just because, as you say, you are ill."

He was conscious again of a sudden misgiving, the first gleam of self-distrust for many a day, and the curious expression that came over her face deepened it.

" You are not very sympathetic," she said. " I imagined a great doctor saw so much of humanity that he became a man of wide compassion and much understanding."

Despite his abnormal success—even, perhaps, because of it—Wynnegate lacked the experience of humanity that an older man would have possessed. Of the human body he knew very much. In technical skill and scientific knowledge he was a past master; of the human soul, especially that variety of it that inhabits the female of the species, he knew as yet exceedingly little, and had no idea of his ignorance.

The doom that overhung the woman on the bed was so tragic that it invested her in his eyes with a certain piteousness, and made his manner to her more leisurely and perhaps more intimate than it should have been. At her last words he spoke with an eagerness that was almost boyish.

" Believe me, I am deeply sympathetic. It is just because of that that I want you to promise me you will see Salmon. If not for your own sake, do it for mine."

"For yours?" She gave him a quick glance. "That is a very different thing. You mean it will set your mind at rest if I do go to that objectionable man?"

"I do."

"Then I promise. And now may I get up and behave like an ordinary mortal? I stayed in bed to show you that I was not altogether intractable." She smiled as she spoke, and he rose to his feet immensely relieved by her consent.

"I appreciate your self-sacrifice, and I will not doom you to a further one to-day," he said, smiling in his turn. "You will go soon?"

"You are never satisfied," she said with a little grimace. "Yes, I will go soon, on condition that you don't entirely throw me overboard. Are you going to be generous?"

"It is a waste of your time," he protested, but she laughed.

"That is my affair. Come, the surrender mustn't be all on my side. You promise to see me once a week, say, at present?"

It was easier to give way than to protest, and the matter surely was inconsiderable after all. He promised with a laugh, and then took her hand to bid her farewell just as there came a knock and the door opened.

By the look that flashed into her eyes Wynnegate guessed who the newcomer was even before he turned round, and Molyneux's voice did not startle him.

"My dear Enid, I had no idea you were so indisposed as to require medical aid. Why have you troubled so busy a man as Mr. Wynnegate?"

There was no hint of irony in the tone; yet again that vague uneasiness troubled Wynnegate. He gave Molyneux a formal greeting as Mrs. Molyneux replied:

"Dr. Lowndes is ill. He suggested when I telephoned that I should see Mr. Wynnegate."

Wynnegate restrained a start. This was not the reply he had expected to hear, and Molyneux glanced at him.

"But Mr. Wynnegate is a surgeon of great importance," he said, and this time there was a curious edge to his voice. "You do not, I fear, realise quite how important. However, I am most grateful to you"—he turned directly to Wynnegate—"and I am sure you will be able to put my wife's mind at rest."

Something subtle and indefinable in both manner and tone annoyed Wynnegate in no small degree. After all, it was true enough, and the vanity of a highly successful and very ambitious young man betrayed him. His visit to Mrs. Molyneux had been in the nature of a favour, not a duty. Bowing to her with a brief "Good morning," he turned to the door and met the elder man's look with resentment.

"Mrs. Molyneux will, no doubt, tell you what my advice has been," he said. "I hope you will persuade her to follow it. Good-morning."

He went downstairs, took his hat and coat from the waiting maid, and stepped out into the sparkling winter sunshine to find his car waiting by the curb.

Driving rapidly homewards he was surprised to find how angry he was; looking back over the short interview he found it hard to assign a reason, save for that vague hostility that was awake between Molyneux and himself. Few people had the power to stir him so, and, for the first time since his success became an assured thing, he was aware of his own youth—no very welcome sensation to a young man of his temperament.

Princess Wanda Tonelli's wonderful constitution pulled her through those first terrible days of exhaust-

tion following on the operation, and Wynnegate waited in anxiety all the more acute because with it was mingled a very deep personal regard. Meanwhile he was exceedingly busy, a series of lectures at one of the big hospitals taking a slice out of his already crowded days. In the pressure of work his resentment against Molyneux faded, and he forgot the unpleasant foreboding that had shadowed him so unreasonably. It came to him as something of a shock, nevertheless, to hear of Dr. Lowndes' sudden death after a few days' illness, the chill having turned to acute pneumonia. The news came by his seeing the obituary notice in the *Times*, and, before breakfast was over, a telephone message came through from Mrs. Molyneux begging him to come and see her some time that day. The list in his appointment book was full, but, under the circumstances, he felt it was a reasonable request from one who persisted in considering herself his patient, and with a little altering and arranging of details he was able to fit in a hasty visit to her about seven o'clock. That done and the appointment booked, he glanced through his letters, attended to what correspondence and business needed immediate care, and at ten o'clock set off for the hospital where every Tuesday and Friday he attended as visiting surgeon.

There everything was forgotten but the work in hand, and till half-past one he worked at top speed, his wonderful skill never shown to greater advantage than when employed in the relief of those helpless and destitute ones that crowd the greatest hospital in east London. The students who crowded round to learn and watch were his ardent admirers, the nurses told off to assist worked their best for a man who lost neither his temper nor control of his tongue when engaged on a serious operation. Wynnegate worked

his wonders always in silence, and was considerate to those who worked with and for him. He lunched at the hospital, then drove back for his usual hour of consultation, shortened to-day by two operations at his special nursing home in Queen Anne Street, and half-past six came before he was able to relax a strain that was tremendous.

Tea, or even a brief ten minutes' rest were out of the question for him to-day. It was only by a great effort that he reached Sloane Street only five minutes after the appointed hour, and he was secretly impatient with the whole circumstances that led to his visit, and annoyed at his lack of firmness in ever permitting them to arise.

He was going to the opera to hear Sammarco in "Otello," and was dining early in consequence; therefore this appointment did not best please him, and he was excessively annoyed to be kept waiting nearly a quarter of an hour. Just as he was making up his mind to leave a message and depart the door opened and, swinging round from the fire, he came face to face with the young girl he had caught sight of on the occasion of his first visit. Seen fully in the highly-lit room, he saw she was even less attractive than he had thought; not because she was ill-featured, but because of the odd expression of eyes and mouth, a sullen yet harassed look that had no business to be on the face of a child of sixteen. Had he been less annoyed with affairs, and in his heart of hearts with himself for allowing his vanity to get in the way of his discretion, he might have been interested in the very look that now struck him as so distasteful. As it was, he bowed very slightly and waited for her to speak, which she did in a clear musical voice that was a surprise to him.

"My mother will see you in a few moments,"

she said, and, crossing the room, took up a silver box, handing it to him.

“ Will you not smoke ?”

Another delay. His vexation was strengthening every moment, and he answered more curtly than he knew.

“ No, thank you. I cannot wait much longer.”

The girl put the box down again and moved away to the door.

“ I am sorry,” she said. “ Of course, you are very busy. Doctors always are—only people forget that.”

He glanced across at her a trifle surprised at tone and words, and an idea coming into his mind stayed her going by a gesture.

“ Wait a moment. How is your mother ?”

She paused obediently, and her young face seemed to harden. “ Jealousy,” thought Wynnegate, and waited with returning disapproval of her whole personality and annoyance at her close regard of himself.

“ She is quite well—at least, she seems so,” was the answer he received. “ I did not know she was ill till you came the other day. Neither did my father.”

“ She is seriously ill—or will be if she doesn’t take care,” Wynnegate replied, and returned to the fire in tacit dismissal. When he glanced round she had gone, and the clock pointed to twenty minutes past seven. This was really too annoying, and, going to the door, he opened it just as Mrs. Molyneux appeared. They met on the threshold, and she spoke hurriedly.

“ Mr. Wynnegate, do forgive me ! It was really too dreadful, but I was out and my car was run into by a taxi, so we had to wait while policemen

took notes and an idiotic crowd gaped and the taxi-driver swore. I thought I should never get here."

He made some reply, and she came in and closed the door.

"I sent Delphine to you, but I'm afraid she wasn't much good. She has not yet acquired the social graces. Now I want to tell you I have really done as you wished. I went to see Dr. Salmon this morning."

That startled him and he showed it, whereupon she laughed.

"You believed I meant to get out of it—well, we had made a bargain, hadn't we? I kept my side of it, and you must keep yours. Do you remember what it was?"

"Of course. What did Salmon say?"

"Tell me if you intend to keep your side of it."

"Yes, yes. I will keep your case under my nominal care, if you will promise to follow Salmon's advice. Tell me what he said."

He was so anxious to hear the great alienist's views that he flung caution to the winds and committed himself without hesitation, and at his last word she laughed again and dropped into a low chair by the fire.

"You are dreadfully curious," she mocked. "Any-one would think I was on the verge of developing some dreadful disease, and you knew it. No—don't look so annoyed. I will tell you. He said I had been overdoing things, that I must rest and, perhaps, go to a nursing home for a few weeks' absolute quiet. He insists on the country for a visit, at all events, and has given me a prescription for my sleeplessness."

"And the dreams? The exhaustion?"

"They are merely the result of too much of the strenuous life. There's nothing more than that.

I made him speak frankly, and he gave me his assurance that there was no serious trouble, no organic weakness even. It was an immense relief. You had frightened me a little. Do you know—you almost look as though you were sorry."

At her last words he pulled himself together with a mental jerk, and managed to make a smiling protest, but in his heart he was dismayed. Nothing organically weak—no serious trouble? Salmon must be mad or blind. What was the man thinking of? And yet he was the greatest alienist in England, one of the most famous in Europe. Utterly nonplussed and not yielding one iota in his own opinion, Wynnegate got up to go. After that verdict there was no more to be said, at least for the present. Mrs. Molyneux stopped him, however.

"Wait a minute—there are quite a lot of things I want to say. Must you hurry?"

Vexed and sorely wounded in his professional vanity, Wynnegate was in no mood to stay and listen to her aimless conversation; drawing back from the hand she put out to detain him, he moved towards the door.

"I'm afraid I must. I have a most important engagement at eight. I will see Dr. Salmon tomorrow and explain why I was so mistaken as to send you to him. I am sure you will excuse me now. I am late already."

She had heard him quietly till he mentioned Salmon's name, then started forward.

"No, no! You mustn't—you needn't. Why should you see Salmon? Why should he tell you anything he has not told me? It's absurd. It's—it's quite unnecessary."

Feverish anxiety gleamed in her eyes and tumbled her words; more than ever was Wynnegate dumb-

founded at Salmon's verdict, but he was master of himself again now and hid his disgust.

" You must allow me to be the best judge of that," he said. " Good-night, Mrs. Molyneux," and, without hearing the torrent of words that broke from her, he went quickly out of the door and, without waiting to put on his coat, quitted the house. Across the wide pavement his car waited and he jumped in with a word flung over his shoulder to the chauffeur, anxious for nothing but to get away and digest the blow to his pride that Salmon had dealt as best he might.

All the way home, and while he dressed at top speed, anger, dismay, and furious impatience warred within him, and his temper was not improved by the fact that dinner, if he wished to hear the first act, was a mere hurried mouthful of soup and fish, after which he set out for Covent Garden in a blacker humour than he had known for years.

An unsuspected weakness—professional vanity—had led him into this irritating business, and he was properly punished by its annoyances for the initial blunder of ever consenting to see Mrs. Molyneux a second time. The knowledge did not tend to sweeten his frame of mind. He determined to end the whole silly futile business—its very insignificance was part of its capacity for irritation—to send a brief note to Mrs. Molyneux that very evening declining to undertake any further care of her case, and so deciding he endeavoured to put the whole matter aside and give himself up to enjoyment of an *opera* he loved.

By and by the beautiful music soothed his fretted nerves and temper, and by the end of the evening his irritation had died away. He had supper with some friends, enjoyed a pleasant hour with them, and driving home, was ready to laugh at himself for his troubles.

It was close on one o'clock when he let himself

into his house, and, for a moment, he hesitated whether to go to his study for a final smoke and drink, or whether to go straight to bed. The matter was decided for him by the appearance of a maid, who had evidently been waiting for him, so quickly did she appear.

“There’s somebody to see you, sir—I waited to—”

“Somebody to see me?” he echoed, “at this hour? What in the world for? How long has he been here?”

“It—it isn’t a gentleman, sir. It’s a lady. She said you were expecting her, that you had told her to wait—I—”

She was a new parlourmaid unused to the ways of the house, and at his look and tone came perilously near to tears.

“I—I—I didn’t know what to do. I am sorry—”

He brushed aside her stammering excuses, speaking sharply.

“Where is the—the lady?”

“In the drawing-room, sir. Oh, I—”

Brushing past her, he ran upstairs, and as he went a cold conviction of the truth dawned upon him; opening the drawing-room door he found he had not been mistaken. There, in a low chair, her evening cloak flung across another close by, sat Mrs. Molyneux.

She rose as he entered, and for a moment they both stood facing one another; then in the woman’s eyes a sudden radiance dawned and she flung out her hands.

“I have waited each time for you to ask me,” she said, and her voice throbbed with an emotion that, for once, was sincere. “And each time you went away in silence, so at last I have come to ask you. I came two hours ago—I thought you were never coming in—Gervase—”

The coldness clutched at his throat at the sound of his name. For a second he was literally unable to speak, then he mastered the dryness in his throat as best he could.

"What are you here for? What right have you to come to me at this hour?"

His anger did not seem to touch her; it was as though she did not even notice it.

"The only reason in the world," she said softly. "Because I could not stay away."

Fear seized him as the dreadful certainty forced itself upon his understanding, but he tried to crush it back.

"Your husband—"

"I have been at a dance. Hugh knew I should be very late. But what does that matter? I don't want to think about Hugh—I want to think of other things. Gervase, come and sit down."

She was coming across to him, and all unconsciously he drew back as she approached. A dreadful horror that she might touch him sent him step by step back to the door. Not till his hands outflung behind his back touched the hard wood did he awake from the sense of nightmare that had held limbs and will paralysed. The sharp contact pulled him together, bringing him back to himself like a shock of cold water might have done. In an instant he was his own master once again, the unreality and helplessness gone, and his brain alert and ready. If he would save her and himself he must be no more a frightened fool, but must act wisely and at once. With a swift movement he left the door and, going across the room, picked up her cloak and held it out.

"Put this on at once," he said. "I'll 'phone for my car. The man has only just gone into the mews. He won't be out of the garage yet. With luck you'll

get back before your husband gets anxious. You can say you couldn't get a taxi. Where was the dance?"

"At Cadogan Gardens—Mrs. Harland's."

"You must say I was there and that Mrs. Harland asked me to send you home in my car—never mind the fact that I don't know her. D'you understand? Quick! Slip this on."

He held out the cloak, but she made no movement to take it. Instead, she looked at him and laughed very softly, a laugh that set his nerves a-quiver.

"Why are you making all these plans to mislead Hugh?" she said. "It's so silly, because I don't want to mislead him. I want him to understand quite clearly."

He dropped the cloak and rang the bell, and, as he waited, she came back to the fire and stood leaning one arm on the mantelpiece. When the frightened parlourmaid opened the door Wynnegate issued his commands without taking his eyes from the woman beside him.

"Telephone to the garage and tell Peters to bring the car round again at once. At once."

The girl slipped away and he spoke once more to Enid Molyneux, softening his tone by mere force of will, for he knew now his only chance was to persuade her to go as speedily as she could. If he attempted to force her to leave, or even if he became too obviously determined he might precipitate the catastrophe he must at all costs avoid. The tottering reason might yet be saved, but a shock, a conflict of wills, even too abrupt a tone and the diseased brain would break down altogether.

"Listen," he said, as quietly as he could, relieved now that some action had been taken. "This plan of yours is too sudden, your husband will be furiously

angry. He will probably come after you and fetch you back. If you will go back quietly now and explain as I have told you we can arrange matters much more wisely. You are tired now, and any fuss would be bad for you."

She looked up at him, a queer sidelong look from beneath her lashes.

"Now you sound more reasonable," she said. "It is such a pity when you speak too loudly. But I can't go back, Gervase. I don't love Hugh in the least. I haven't done for years. I didn't want a child and he knew it, and yet Torquil came. I have never loved him since. Why should I have a child when I didn't wish for one? I told him often enough I didn't like children. I'm not a woman to forget. Don't you understand? I've waited so long for you. Now we are together at last, and I cannot live without you."

His fingers resting on the mantelpiece closed sharply on the edge, but he spoke quietly, holding her eyes with his.

"That is just what you may have to do if you stay now," he said. "You have been very daring in risking everything to come like this, but, believe me, it isn't the best way to arrange matters. Let me put on your cloak and send you back."

"You are a very good pleader!" she said, smiling up at him. "You almost persuade me, only I am afraid you are trying to get rid of me and then tell Hugh."

The cunning of her words forced him to keep his manner very quiet, almost indifferent; to an outsider she would have appeared quite normal, only a trifle amused by his persistence. The sound of a car drawing to a standstill in the silent street told him Peters was ready and he smiled back at her.

"How disbelieving you are!" he said. "Have you known me fail when I gave you my word?"

She considered a moment, surveying him thoughtfully, then made a gesture of dissent.

"Never," she admitted, "you have been most reliable. Only now—it is different. I wish I could be quite sure."

The delay was stringing his nerves to breaking point, and at her last words a fine beading of perspiration broke out upon his forehead. What if she were saner than he believed? What if he were mistaken and Salmon right?—or had she ever been to Salmon at all?

Roughly pushing the thought from him, he bent down and took both her hands, pulling her to her feet.

"You are very unkind to me," he said, "I don't deserve such distrust. The car is waiting. Do as I want you now and I will ring up early to-morrow so that we may make really suitable plans."

She let him put her cloak round her and fasten the great white fox collar, and, at his last words, laid her hand on his arm.

"You will take me right away?" she said.

"That is what you wish, isn't it?" he said lightly. "Well, don't you see I must get money together and fix things decently. Remember you've just said I'm to be depended on. Come with—"

Breaking harshly into the midnight silence came the noise of a taxi furiously driven and as furiously brought to a halt with a grinding of gear and a jarring of brakes. Almost at the same instant came the slam of a door and a peremptory knocking. Molyneux had arrived.

Now that the worst had happened Wynnegate was no longer either afraid or disturbed. Instead, he was

quite calm, entirely master of himself, and, leaving the woman where she was, he went to the door and opened it.

"Briggs," he said, loud enough for his voice to be heard below, "ask Mr. Molyneux to come straight upstairs."

There was the sound of a hurried entry, the maid's voice answering some inaudible question, then Wynnegate went back into the drawing-room and waited.

He gave one glance at Mrs. Molyneux, who had gone back to the hearth and stood there, saw her quiet, almost indifferent, and turned to meet Molyneux as he entered. The elder man broke fiercely into the room as if he expected resistance; then, seeing them both and the complete calmness that awaited him, he made a great effort to master his agitation, closing the door quietly and coming across to the centre of the room. It was to his wife that he spoke first.

"Your message was most thoughtful," he said; although his voice was quiet there was a curious undercurrent in it as of some tremendous force held hard in check. "It saved me both time and difficulty. You seem quite at home. Perhaps Mr. Wynnegate can explain what he intends to do?"

He turned his glance to Wynnegate, his fingers clenching and unclenching on the back of the chair he held, his only sign of agitation. Wynnegate answered him as quietly.

"You will know better than I. Your wife came under a misapprehension. I had telephoned for my car to take her home just before you arrived. You may have noticed it outside."

Molyneux's upper lip lifted at the corner.

"Very good of you," he said; "you return me my property after your use of it. Most thoughtful of

you. I always appreciate those people who return borrowed goods."

Wynnegate's hands clenched and the blood hammered in his temples, but he forced back the rage that surged within him. Molyneux was only acting as every other man would act—as he himself would—he spoke as levelly as he could when he could command his voice.

"I admit the apparent justice of your accusation," he said. "You have every obvious reason for your suspicions. Yet they are entirely without foundation. Mrs. Molyneux's presence here is unfortunate—no more."

"Very unfortunate." There was a sneer in the other's voice. "Of course you would say that. Civilisation demands your denial. Luckily it doesn't demand that I believe it."

"Mrs. Molyneux will tell you the same."

"Naturally. D'you take me for a child?"

Wynnegate glanced at Enid Molyneux, who stood motionless and silent, even smiling a little and listening intently to every word. She had the detached attitude of one who watches an interesting play.

"No," he said, speaking with difficulty. "I am quite aware that I'm asking an unheard-of thing, yet I do ask it. Your wife's presence here is caused by a perfectly innocent desire to confound an opinion I have repeatedly given her as to her health. Is not that so, Mrs. Molyneux?"

He turned to her, but before she could reply, Molyneux broke in.

"One moment, please. This opinion that you hold as to her health? What was it?"

"A serious one. When I first saw your wife, just over a week ago, I believed her nerves to be so seriously overstrained that I advised her to consult an alienist

without delay. I suggested Dr. Charles Salmon, of Harley Street. Your wife promised to take my advice, but wished me to watch her case myself for a few days."

"And you consented?"

"I did."

"Believing it to be a case for a brain specialist?"

"Yes."

"You say my wife promised to consult Dr. Salmon?"

"Yes. I have seen her three times since that day, not counting the evening I met her at Mrs. Sinclair's. Each time I have repeated my advice."

"You did not think of inquiring as to her general health of her own family physician, Dr. Lowndes?"

"I suggested that at my first meeting, when Mrs. Molyneux came to consult me here. The consultation was arranged for last Friday morning. Dr. Lowndes telephoned to say he was unwell. As you know, he speedily became worse, and I never saw him."

"That is a great pity. And to-night my wife came to consult you again—at one o'clock?"

A little pulse just below the temple was beating furiously in Wynnegate's cheek, his forehead was wet, but his voice was quite even.

"She arrived much earlier. I spent the evening at the opera and had supper afterwards with some friends. I believe I had been here about twenty minutes when you arrived."

"And the consultation? The advice?"

"Mrs. Molyneux came to tell me that she saw Dr. Salmon this afternoon."

"And his opinion?"

"Did not coincide with mine. Will you tell your husband what his was, Mrs. Molyneux?"

At his question she dropped her rôle of interested

spectator and looked from one to the other with a quick glance.

"What do you want me to do?" she said.

Wynnegate moistened his lips.

"To tell your husband of your visit to Dr. Salmon," he said.

"Dr. Salmon? My visit to Dr. Salmon? What are you talking about? Who is Dr. Salmon?"

A stifled sound came from Molyneux, but Wynnegate put up his hand to enjoin silence.

"Dr. Salmon is the alienist whom I advised you to consult," he said. "Don't you remember?"

She turned to him, smiling suddenly at his question, and stretching out her hand, laid it on his arm.

"I think you're mad, Gervase. I've never heard you mention Dr. Salmon—and is this discussion between you two going on much longer? I am so horribly tired. Can't you send Hugh away?"

Silence greeted her question, a silence that seemed to last for hours. Then Molyneux spoke:

"I thought not," he said, and his voice was suddenly thick. "It was not a well-arranged scheme. We will discuss matters at a more suitable time—alone. For the present, as I don't wish for a scandal, I propose to take my wife home. Enid!"

Wynnegate made no movement. He felt for the moment as if every faculty of mind and body were in abeyance. Almost indifferently he watched Molyneux turn to his wife.

"Enid, go downstairs."

Mechanically she moved, went across to the door, and suddenly burst out laughing. At the sound Molyneux leapt forward, catching her arm as though in a vice.

"Stop that," he said, "stop it, d'you hear?"

As if the iron grip on her arm were less than nothing,

she shook it off, and, at the same instant, the numbness left Wynnegate's brain. That laugh, tearing the silence, awakened every power that had slept all these last dreadful minutes: he was no longer a man fighting in a losing fight for his honour, but a doctor with all his knowledge and instinct on the alert.

He was at Molyneux's side in an instant.

"Let her alone. You can do nothing—don't touch her till I come back. I won't be a moment."

He was out of the room in an instant, rushing down to his consulting-room, the peals of laughter following him through the silent house. He felt as if he were in a nightmare, yet his brain was clear and his fingers steady as he sought and found what he needed, measuring out certain drops into a hypodermic syringe. Even as he left the room the laughter changed into a series of piercing screams, and, with a leap of his pulses, he ran back, passing on his way the terrified, yet curious maid.

Enid Molyneux was leaning back in a corner of the couch, and over her bent her husband holding her wrists, and from her lips poured short, sharp screams that rang ceaselessly through the room. Wynnegate pushed Molyneux aside, caught her bare arm above his clenched fingers, and thrust the needle deeply into the white flesh, jerking a command over his shoulder.

"Hold her still if you can."

For the moment united they forced her back as she struggled, then her jerking movements grew feebler, and, as the injection took effect, the screaming ceased. A moment more and she lay back white and unconscious, and across her helplessness the two men faced one another.

Wynnegate spoke first.

"Now I can tell you," he said. "Your wife is ill—

desperately ill. If she had not been she would have known better than to come here to-night. Just because she was she did not consider what such coming might mean. She told me she had seen Salmon to-day. I do not believe it. Neither do you believe me. I am not surprised. I could not do so if I were in your place. All I ask is that you will, as far as publicity goes, suspend action and judgment till he has seen your wife. If I were the man you believe I could not hold my position here in London for one week. To-morrow, when Mrs. Molyneux comes to herself, she will probably remember nothing of this evening's happenings. Certainly not those of the last hour or two. If you value her sanity, do not try to force her memory. Now I advise you to let me send my car for you to take her home. You don't want a taxi-driver to see an unconscious woman put in the cab. My man can be trusted. You know quite well that I shall not leave this house except in the usual order of work. That is all I have to say."

Chapter I

THE station of Kala Ismail Khan, West Central District of the N.W. Frontier Provinces, commands the southern entrance to a Pass, the safe keeping of which is deemed by Viceroys and Generals to be of some importance to our Indian Empire. Consequently, a certain number of blaspheming white troops—Kala Ismail Khan is not a place sought after by either officers or rank and file—are stationed here to leaven the native regiments and keep the Border quiet.

Not many miles away the Hills rise abruptly from the stifling Plains, giving a certain beauty to the distant view, but adding to, rather than detracting from, the torment of those working in the heat—for the Hills call up visions of tumbling ice-green rivers, of stately trees and dew-drenched turf; of life-giving air off the snow slopes of the Hindu-Kush and valleys clothed in dripping moss and festooned with ferns.

Such visions are not good when a man must wake to the reality of stony wastes and sun-scorched roads with a sun burning down on corrugated iron roofs, the temperature well over 110° , and leave too distant to be worth thinking about. Here, too, the monsoon is practically a negligible quantity, and cholera a not infrequent visitor.

Kala Ismail Khan stood at the mouth of a wide cheerless valley which, narrowing almost imperceptibly, led to the Pass itself—a valley bounded at first by stony hummocks too insignificant to be called hills, then by higher ridges, then by steep slopes of shale and rock, and lastly, where it deepened and dwindled

to a mere sword-cut through granite and basalt, by the Hills themselves, the real Hills, towering into the heavens, lifting their vast heights against the blue in a dazzle of gleaming snow.

The station itself straggled across the dun-coloured earth as such stations do. To the south-east the usual huddle of the native town crouched behind its protective mud walls; to the west lay the cavalry lines and the wide dusty parade-ground, and to the north-east some ten or fifteen miles away Peshawur formed the link with civilisation. Towards India proper the open country was more fertile, and, after the scanty rains, blossomed in patches of green and gold where the farmers and peasants tilled the soil, but on all other sides the stony arid desert hemmed in this outpost of empire, its monotony hardly broken by occasional walled and flat-roofed villages, or the square mud fort five miles further on, which commanded the actual entrance to the Pass.

From the station westward the caravan road could be seen winding amid its stony ridges till it was hidden from sight by the foothills—a road not devoid of romance leading into the forbidden country of Afghanistan. The station itself was built on the stony plain, its wide, white military roads crossing and recrossing each other rigidly, a bare sun-scorched dusty place, scantily sheltered by a few trees, its bungalows all colour-washed and square-shouldered, standing in compounds possessing white-washed walls and gateways innocent of gates. Trees, stunted by the heat, planted at equal distances from each other, emphasised the regularity of the roads and cast a thrice welcome shade on to the glare below, but the shade began and ended abruptly, and beyond was the barren plain; yet the place had a certain charm of its own in the weeks before the furnace heat of the summer, and

northward came relief to the eye where the majestic Safed Koh range lifted itself against the azure of the heavens, a silent barrier of glittering white. At the westward end of the cantonment was a bungalow rather bigger than the others, its walls washed a pale sunshiny yellow and protected by wide pillared verandahs. Its garden, like itself, was a trifle bigger than its neighbours, a rambling dusty place yet possessed of considerable beauty, despite the difficulties encountered by mali* and owner alike of scorching sun and scanty rain. It was more or less overrun like all the other gardens with lime and orange trees, bushes of pomegranate and oleander, but for a few brief weeks roses of every hue and variety, with starry jessamine, scarlet hibiscus and purple bougainvillea made of it one fairy paradise. A paradise all too short-lived, alas ! for with the torment of the summer, flowers and leaves withered to a scorched brown beneath a sky of brass.

Just beyond the white-washed walls of the compound, the shade-trees ended abruptly and the road ran out into the stony waste that led down a gentle slope to the parade ground, where on this particular afternoon in early April, a battery of frontier garrison artillery was busily at work. Further away still, on the edge of a stony upward slope two companies of native infantry were drilling, mere dots of brownish-yellow on the dusty ground, but on the cantonment itself the sleepy peace of the afternoon had descended, only a few wandering dogs or ever-twittering sparrows being still awake.

A little way from the station stood the hospital, a white-washed building of no great size, possessing a narrow verandah and a bare compound shaded in one corner only by a group of scanty acacia trees. Just

* Gardener.

now it was nearly empty, the men being fit after the long cold months of a good winter, but later its capacity might be taxed to the uttermost, for with the hot weather the ever present dread of cholera strengthened and fever was a daily occurrence. There was, too, another difficulty which had arisen a month or two ago, and it was this which was causing hours of anxiety and endless correspondence with the powers that be, on the part of the medical officer who had just completed his afternoon inspection of the stuffy rooms that did duty as wards.

He came out now and stood for a moment on the verandah, surveying the stony countryside, a tall, lithe figure in well-worn khaki drill tunic and cord breeches. Nine years had altered Gervase Wynnegate very considerably. The sense of almost aggressive good fortune had left him, the hint of self-complacency that at times had been noticeable in tone and manner had given place to a quiet self-reliance. His face was harder, there were lines about the mouth and eyes that told of stern lessons learnt and facts faced no less sternly, but those very facts and lessons had purged the man clean of his vanity—even though that vanity had had reasonable excuse—and had hardened and strengthened what was fine in his character.

The sun-helmet hid the greyness on his temples and cast shadows into the clear grey-blue of his eyes, but even so it was easy to see that here was one worthy of the traditions of his race.

After that frowning scrutiny of the landscape, Wynnegate took the reins from the servant and, mounting the big chestnut waler, rode away towards the station, sitting loosely back in the saddle, deep in thought.

The difficulty facing him had been strengthened by an official letter received that morning: a brief

information that his request for certain new equipment and for a grant to build a couple of airy wards on to the present hospital was considered to be uncalled for. Although the hot weather had not yet begun, although it was not actually due for at least another month, there was a glare already in the sunshine, and the trees were showing tinges of brown at the edges of their leaves, giving a hint of the furnace-heat that was to come. Everything promised for an exceptional time of trial, and only four miles away the works on the new irrigation canal had brought into the station's vicinity over a couple of thousand coolies and other workmen, of warring castes and habits. Such a camp as that about the canal works was a hotbed for any epidemic despite the rigorous care exercised and the strict rules that were enforced on the troops. Should plague or cholera break out there in any serious degree it was a foregone conclusion that the native city would suffer, and, therefore, the garrison. Small wonder, looking ahead, Wynnegate had made repeated demands for a grant from headquarters for much-needed hospital equipment.

Kala Ismail Khan lay across the trade route from the east, and on this afternoon as Wynnegate rode leisurely towards the station he could see a column of dust away to the West along the wide road that meant the presence of one of the caravans returning from its journey into India. He pulled up when it drew near, to watch a procession that appealed to his sense of romance despite the fact that it was a bi-annual occurrence. The traders, mounted on their wiry Afghan ponies, fierce-eyed, bearded men with their horse-boys and servants, donkeys laden with odd bundles, splendid mountain women, unveiled and tramping or mounted, beside the sturdy little beasts with here and there a baby or a couple of toddlers—for all sorts of travellers

join up for protection's sake with the caravan—and, most important of all, the camels. Camels by the hundred, laden on the return journey with all kinds of goods—Manchester cottons, hardware, metals, sugar, cheap German goods such as alarum and cuckoo clocks, horrible gilt mirrors and plush frames, indigo and great bales of leather. The huge Afghan camel with powerful thighs and fetlocks, its shaggy coat hanging in untidy bunches, is able to carry an enormous amount of weight, striding along at its own pace and refusing to be hustled; and the men in charge are equally well worth looking at, though for a different reason. Finely built, with keen, steady eyes, splendid carriage and every kind of colour, from palest cream that is whiter than many an Englishman with blue eyes and fair hair, to the black locks and olive skin of the true Afghan, or the brown and chocolate of other district races.

Wynnegate's interest in these caravans that passed down into India about October and returned in March and April was the more keen because for one exciting period he had been held in ransom by the Muhammed Khels, after a scrap with a small body of Pathan troops.

For four months he had been held prisoner, the while exorbitant demands for ransom from his captors agitated Frontier politics, then quite suddenly one winter morning he was informed by the chieftain who ruled the village that he was free, and forthwith was escorted twenty miles by a band of fierce-eyed, hairy fellows, armed with Lee Metfords, to the nearest point where one of the caravans would pass. There he was bidden good-bye in an entirely friendly fashion by his escort, and soon found himself once more in the N.W. Frontier Province. It was not till some months later that he learnt the truth from a horse-trader who lived

somewhere beyond Kabul—a personage always reminding him irresistibly of Kim's Mahbub Ali—with whom he had struck up an old friendship. The story was brief and deeply interesting as an insight into an extremely interesting race. His captors, fully intending to extract a heavy ransom or put him out of the way, had been at first distrustful, then amazed, then openly grateful at his conduct, for, to their everlasting astonishment, they found their captive a veritable wizard, able to restore the sick, cure the lame, almost, so they believed, raise from the dead. Despite lack of adequate materials, Wynnegate had set to work amidst the suffering creatures round him, partly from a humane desire to do what he could, partly to give himself occupation. He performed operations that would have made his hair stand on end in the long-ago Brook Street days, essayed cures on pitiable creatures brought to death's door by neglect and dirt, and all unknown to himself became famous as a healer. The fierce wild men around, childlike in many ways despite their recklessness and cruelty, could not understand, but they could appreciate, and even Wynnegate himself could never quite know the reputation he had gained among some of the most unruly tribes in the world.

On this particular April afternoon Hamrad Ali, his Afghan friend, was not with the caravan, having gone up to Kabul some two weeks before, and after watching away the medley of men and animals, Wynnegate rode off towards the station, his thoughts pleasantly distracted from the problem that had of late begun to obsess them.

He put his horse to an easy canter as he approached the cantonment and, turning in at the gateway of the yellow bungalow, threw his reins to a servant who sprang up from a doze in the sunshine, and went up

the two steps into the verandah. A grey-bearded Pathan khitmutter answered the query as to whether his mistress was in, and with a sigh of relief Wynnegate entered the cool dusky twilight, so grateful after the glare without. The room into which the khitmutter ushered him was long and deliciously cool, scented with the flowers that everywhere showed their fresh faces from bowls and jars, its walls colour-washed a soft green, its matted floor strewn here and there with Persian rugs. The furniture was covered in a green and white chintz, the few pictures were well chosen, and it was clear to the eye that this was no temporary resting-place to be lived in anyhow, but a real home upon which the owners lavished care and discrimination. As the servant announced: "Wynnegate Sahib," a woman rose from a low arm-chair at the further end of the room, and came to meet him with outstretched hand.

"Captain Wynnegate, how nice of you! I was afraid no one was going to take pity on me this afternoon. Come and sit down and we'll have tea at once."

She signed him to a chair, into which he dropped comfortably, gave the order for tea, and laid aside the work on which she had been engaged.

"Fred is at Pandu to-day," she said. "He rode over early this morning. The work is really appalling. I should commit suicide if I had to do it, it is so dry. But he really likes it, which is a blessing."

"How's his Pushtu getting on?" Wynnegate inquired, appreciatively sniffing a rose he had taken out of a bowl close by. "What a beauty!" he added, parenthetically.

"Yes, isn't it? I'm so thankful I knew something about gardening before I came out, even though I daren't actually do it. Splendidly. And all the hard labour is more than repaid by the delight of these hill

Pathans when a sahib speaks to them in their native tongue. Haven't you noticed it? You are such an Admirable Crichton with regard to dialects and the like."

He smiled at the compliment and nodded.

"Wish I were! Yes, often. They are such defiant-looking fellows as a rule, and when you speak to 'em in their own language they beam like delighted children. Howard is right. It's well worth the trouble."

They chatted idly while tea was in progress, Wynnegate resting mind and body in the quiet room and the society of the woman before him. Marguerite Howard possessed a quality not so common as it is supposed: that of being a perfect hostess.

In her company men and women were at their ease, and, therefore, at their best; her friends could count on an ever-ready, ever-sincere welcome, and in her flower-scented drawing-room intimate talk flourished unchecked by the vague attention of a woman who is impatient to be doing something else elsewhere.

In reality a busy woman, capable as a house-keeper and with a veritable genius for loving the man she had married, she nevertheless gave the outside world the impression of having limitless leisure; consequently in reality it was the last thing she possessed.

Presently the conversation turned to strictly local matters.

"Is it true that there is trouble brewing beyond Chora?" she said. "There seem to be rumours to that effect."

"Quite true, I believe, and if so we shall probably send a detachment up. Here's Crawford. Perhaps he can tell you more than I."

Crawford, senior major of the Sikhs, who was announced at that moment, was easily the most popular officer in Kala Ismail Khan; handsome, dark-eyed, with a ready laugh, a lazy voice and the kindest heart in the world—so his friends said. Perhaps the slackers or grumblers with whom he came in contact could have told a different tale, but they wisely held their peace. He shook hands with Mrs. Howard, settled himself comfortably in the corner of a couch and gratefully accepted the proffered “peg.”

“If I were asked to define the height of bliss,” he remarked, as the ice tinkled refreshingly in the tall glass, “I should say a peg like this in circumstances such as these after two hours on that Hades we call the parade ground.”

“Your mythology, or whatever it is, is a little mixed,” Wynnegate remarked. “Hades is supposed by the classical mind to be ‘a place of shade.’”

“Major Crawford was thinking of my sensibilities,” Mrs. Howard put in. “You’ll have some tea presently, won’t you? I’m expecting my husband very soon.”

“Thank you, yes. Heavens! How good!” He surveyed the crystal tumbler frosted and glittering with the icy temperature of its contents, glanced at his hostess with a little nod and took a long drink, while Wynnegate laughed unsympathetically.

“When you’ve quite finished making a beast of yourself, perhaps you’ll endeavour to be entertaining,” he remarked. “Mrs. Howard has heard these rumours like we all have. Is there anything in ‘em, d’you think?”

“The Zakha Khel business?” Crawford suddenly became serious. “Why, I believe there is. I met the C.O. just now, and, as we passed, he called out to

me, 'I shall have news for you before mess,' so I imagine it's about that. Jove! I hope my little lot gets sent up."

"Pretty certain to, I should think. I've been expecting trouble over there for a long time."

"Desmond will be excited," Marguerite Howard said, her tone betraying nothing of the fear that leapt to life within her. "He's so desperately keen to see some 'real service,' as he calls it."

Wynnegate glanced at her a quick clear look of understanding.

"Yes, he will," he said, "but I doubt if he'll go. They won't deplete the garrison here very greatly unless matters are more serious than they expect. Desmond is too junior to stand very much chance."

The delicate colour had faded in Marguerite's cheeks, but it came back slowly at his words.

"At the risk of being selfish, I hope you're right," she said. "Here is Desmond."

Desmond Howard came in in company with another subaltern, a tall, broad-shouldered boy just over eighteen, grey-eyed and fair, like his mother.

As a matter of fact Desmond Howard possessed a rarely happy disposition, sunny and frank, yet with a reserve of courage and determination inherited from the two people who had given him life, and, although he had only been out a couple of months, he was already liked by his officers and secretly mothered by his stalwart Pathans who admired his fairness and took pride in his youth.

After a few moments' conversation he turned to his mother.

"Any news of Delphine yet?" he asked.

"A wire from Lahore this morning. She will be here to-morrow. A niece—at least we call her that—of mine," she explained, turning to the others.

"On her first visit to India. No, not a *débutante*," seeing the frightened look in Crawford's eyes. "She has been out quite a long time. A charming girl of a rather unusual type. She won't flirt with you, Harold—but she will be willing to be an excellent comrade."

"She's stunning," Desmond put in enthusiastically. "Rather like a very jolly boy, but not a bit masculine. D'you see what I mean? We've been friends for years, haven't we, mother?"

"Centuries at least," Marguerite said with gentle irony. "She's been staying with my brother, who is, as you know, on the G.H.Q. staff."

"Does she know the Frontier?" Gervase inquired.

"Not at all. She's been in India six months—Calcutta, Simla, Kashmir. She has travelled quite a great deal, but the Frontier will be something new. I'm interested to see the impression it makes."

Crawford nodded:

"I should think so. Please introduce me quickly, won't you? I'm thankful she isn't a young *débutante*. Such always terrify me. By the way, what is her name?"

"Molyneux. Perhaps you know my brother?"

"Brigadier-General Sir Bruce Molyneux? Dear lady, I have heard of him as the slave hears of the emperor. But I have never entered his august presence. Brass hats are not for the humble likes of me."

"He's not a bad sort," Desmond put in. "Too handsome for my taste. Fashion-plate. Dresses too well—but I suppose he can't help it. He gave me quite a good time once when I was at a crammer's and he was in London on leave."

"Your praise would overwhelm him," Crawford

rejoined. "Is this illustrious personage bringing Miss Molyneux?"

In the chatter between them, Wynnegate's silence passed unnoticed, and directly a suitable opportunity arose, he took his leave and went off to the bungalow near by that he shared with Crawford, desirous of a quiet time to himself before it should become necessary to change for mess.

Molyneux—Molyneux—surely so annoying a coincidence would not happen! And yet, it was just the sort of occurrence that did transpire, because, apparently, it was so exceedingly unwelcome.

For nine years he had worked and striven to forget the very name of Molyneux, to blot all memory of it out of his life, and here, in this remote station of the N.W. Frontier, it threatened to be revived in no minor degree. It was, he admitted, exceedingly unlikely that this girl, niece of Sir Bruce Molyneux, of whom he had of course often heard, was one and the same with Hugh Molyneux's daughter. There were plenty of Molyneuxs in the world; yet what if it should be so? Of course, the simple course was to ask Mrs. Howard, but that, oddly enough, he was disinclined to do. Contemplation of such a possibility did not make the event any the more pleasant. His memories connected with the name held nothing but pain and discomfort, and it was in a distinctly disturbed frame of mind that he went off to mess.

Chapter II

THE Club was the centre of the military life of the station as Howard's bungalow was of the social; a mud-walled place, roofed with corrugated iron, with a broad verandah and a large untidy compound. The mess was a long high room, lit only by slits of windows ten feet up the white-washed walls, screened with wire netting, and with screened double doors, a cheerless enough place, but the smoking-room was quite pleasant, with its long cane chairs, its nondescript collection of coloured prints, its rather dilapidated piano and general air of ease.

Here, on this particular evening, some half-dozen of the officers adjourned when mess was over, and the Colonel absent, for Houghton had gone over to his own bungalow and his wife's drawing-room, because she was going home for good the following day, and rumour had it that no one lamented the fact, least of all her long-suffering husband; consequently, comment was unrestrained, and the prospect of war with the tribes beyond Chora loomed large in the general conversation.

"It'll stiffen the men up a bit," Ruthven, a captain, remarked in the course of the evening. "They're getting flabby, and the hot weather'll tuck 'em up. What's the trouble?"

Carter, a subaltern attached to the mountain battery, thrust out his feet and stared at his boots.

"Zakha Khels again," he said, "and they've been robbin' over this side the Border. A detachment of the Guides went over and they cut 'em up. Didn't you hear the C.O. before mess?"

"Meaning we'll be sent after 'em? Good—very

good." It was Crawford, who had just come in, who spoke. "Now you'll have a chance with your grievances, Wynnegate."

Wynnegate shrugged his shoulders.

"What chance I should like to know? I can't get a big enough grant of drugs and stores for use even now, much less for an epidemic, and as for a possibility of a campaign worth the name, who wouldn't have a grievance?"

"Good old Gervase!" Crawford muttered half beneath his breath. "Pitch into 'em at Simla."

But Wynnegate, with memory of the irrigation works camp and the prospect the Colonel's conversation at mess had opened up, was in no mood for badinage. His fingers tightened suddenly on the arm of his chair, and he glanced at the faces of the men lounging in the room, faces indistinctly seen through the blue haze of smoke.

"Haven't I done so?" he retorted, and there was a bitterness in his voice which roused the men around him from their attitude of half-jesting laziness to attention. "Haven't I reported, cursed and implored. They know if they choose to pay attention, the state the I.M. is in—how could they *help* knowing? Each year that damned Ewartson cuts down expenses still more, and is patted on the back by the Indian Council and Hadingly"—Hadingly was the Viceroy—"for effecting much needed economical reforms! Reforms! And if we had a serious campaign out here on our hands what would happen? Drugs, antitoxins, instruments—all stale, out of date, worse than useless! If you want to get hold of the new appliances or want reliable stuff that hasn't gone bad, where can you get it? Only at the native hospitals equipped and kept going by the generosity and the far-sightedness of native rulers like Pertab Singh and Cooch-Behar!"

Men who are patriots and good sportsmen and who pride themselves on getting the very best available for their people. That's a nice state of things for the ruling race, isn't it?"

He broke off suddenly, aware of the futility of complaining, half scornful of his own earnestness, and stood with his back to the others, staring out into the violet dusk. For the space of a minute or two there was a silence in the room, the silence of agreement. Then Crawford spoke at last.

" You speak of a serious campaign out here—Border troubles and so forth. What about a bigger war? What if we get involved in the flare-up that's coming in Europe? India will have to take her share in that and bear her own responsibility."

Wynnegate turned from his contemplation of the night and faced the speaker.

" Yes, I've thought of that often. This policy of financial retrenchment will spell hell for the men engaged in the actual business of fighting. The army will be all right till it's in hospital, and then, God help it—if it gets a hospital to get into."

" D'you think it as bad as that, Wynnegate?"

Wynnegate looked across at Ruthven, who had spoken.

" Quite," he said curtly, and proceeded to fill his briar.

" It's this confounded jobbery," put in another subaltern, by name Wilde. " Up here we only get things done because we know how to do 'em. We don't get any Simla business and brass-hat influence messing round, thank Heaven! We're too far out of the way and in too bally uncomfortable a part of the world for the staff to come poking around. Fellows only come here who know their job and are keen on it, or don't know it and want to learn."

"Well done, old thing ! Silence for the speaker!" Crawford said lazily, and everyone laughed, not because it was specially funny, but because it is not wise to take life too seriously all the time when you are fifteen miles on the wrong side of the Indus.

"Get back to the Zakha Khels," Ruthven said. "I wasn't here to-night. What did the C.O. say before mess?"

"That it was about time something was applied stronger than remonstrance or stoppage of allowance," Crawford answered. "They're making a damned nuisance of themselves. Ever since the Tirah Campaign concluded they've been persistently inimical to a peaceful settlement."

"The Tirah Campaign was before your time, my son," Ruthven put in, seeing Wilde impatient to speak. "And these blighters certainly need a lesson. They've robbed, raided, murdered, and burned for ten years on end and for untold years before."

"Where does their territory lie, then?" Wilde asked. "Near by?"

"Just south of the Khyber and all about. The Bajar Valley contains their most important villages, and it's a bit off the main line of communication. Crawford, you were through the Tirah. Weren't they a nuisance in the campaign itself?"

"They most emphatically were. Rotten lot of fellows. They were responsible for the attacks on the Khyber outposts at the beginning of the whole business, and they played the deuce when the 2nd Division withdrew from Tirah."

"Shouldn't think they'll send up a punitive expedition as late in the spring as this," Wynnegate said.

"Pass the matches, will you, Wilde?"

"Houghton expects orders," Crawford rejoined lazily from the depths of his big chair. "But pro-

bably they won't come. Anyone have a round of bridge?"

The talk drifted off to inconsequent matters as the four departed to a table, and Wynnegate, book in hand, found his thoughts recurring once more to the conversation of the afternoon despite his resolution to the contrary.

He was just making up his mind to go home to bed, sick of his thoughts and utterly uninterested in his book, when Ram Khan the khitmutgar came in to say he was wanted, and going out, he found a messenger sent up from the hospital to say that one of the patients had had an attack of hæmorrhage. Would he go down at once?

The call had gone first to his bungalow, and his servant had brought round the waler, so in a very few minutes he had arrived at the hospital, to find the man who had been fairly well in the afternoon perilously near death. It was nearly morning before he dare leave the ward, and then only to fear there might be another relapse. The dawn was breaking when he got back to his bungalow, and it was not worth while going to bed, so he bathed and changed, and went out for a brisk canter in the cool, sweet air, returning in time for chota hazri.

Meanwhile, along the road from Peshawur a solitary tonga was making its noisy way, escorted by two stalwart Pathan troopers, and containing, beside the hairy driver, a frightened ayah, muffled up in her shawls, convinced she was going to be murdered, and Marguerite Howard's English guest.

It was already hot enough to make midday travelling unpleasant, and Delphine, who had been escorted as far as Peshawur by some of her uncle's friends, an elderly and irascible colonel of infantry and his wife, had begged to be allowed to go straight on to Kala

Ismail Khan sooner than stay twenty-four hours in the city. Pundita, her ayah, was a devoted and trustworthy servant, and as both Colonel and Mrs. James were thoroughly annoyed by a lengthy journey and irritated by Delphine's irresistible gaiety, the latter got her way. Fear of adventure was unknown to her, and the knowledge that General Molyneux would have sternly forbidden the lonely journey added zest to its accomplishment. Colonel Houghton had sent two of his Pathans to act as escort, so Delphine set forth in triumph, and at dawn found herself in a strange land.

As the tonga clattered through the night she had dozed lightly, serenely unheeding of noise and jarring, but when the eastern sky changed from star-strewn purple to dove-grey, she rubbed the sleep from her eyes and sat up.

Ahead the road stretched like a ribbon across a stony waste of land that lay unbroken to the southern horizon, till, climbing a low ridge, it disappeared; northward, patches of scrub broke the monotony of the landscape, and, as the light strengthened and the tonga topped the ridge, Delphine could see that there was a certain amount of cultivated land about her. She was too much of a stranger to recognise the crops, or know that the time of the first harvest, known as rabi, was close at hand, but she was relieved to see evidences of human occupation, so arid and desolate did this land appear. Then, suddenly, as if some miracle had happened, a line of crimson fire lit the northern sky, an irregular jagged streak of dazzling colour high up above the shadows, and involuntarily she uttered an exclamation which drew from the Pathan driver a guttural reply. It was the trooper riding just behind her who guessed the meaning of her little cry of surprise, and checking his horse so

that he was level with the back seat his white teeth gleamed in his beard.

"The Hills, memsahib," he said in halting, yet distinct English. "The snow and the sun on the hills. Behold the day!" Even as he spoke the crimson was changing first to rose and then to gold, and a great light in the east flushing the sky even to the zenith proclaimed the truth of his words. Delphine's hands twisted themselves together and her lips parted. For a moment she did not speak, then she smiled back at the man and nodded.

"It is a miracle!" she said, hushing her voice in half-unconscious reverence, and, though the man could not hear what she said, even if he could have understood, he was content that she had realised what he had meant.

Five minutes later and mystery and glory had vanished together in the clear light of the risen sun; on either side of the road were little fields with towers dotted about them, and ahead, barely a mile away, the native city could be distinguished, a huddle of brown and grey.

Delphine heaved a sigh for the dawn just past and prodded her snoring ayah, who awoke with a start and a scream that brought a grin to the driver's swarthy face.

"Wake up, Pundita! We're just there." Pundita glanced round wildly, saw the rifles of the troopers, and screamed again.

"Oh, that we were back with the Generally-Sahib! Oh, that we had never come to be murdered! May the Holy One protect us! Ah! I die!"

"You don't do anything of the sort, you old silly!" was her mistress's vigorous retort. "You want chota hazri and so do I! No one is going to hurt you, and in a minute or two we shall be at home. Don't scream any more."

Pundita moaned anew, but in a more subdued key, and, at that moment, a violent lurch nearly sent her flying out of the tonga as they turned in at the gateway of the yellow bungalow and pulled up with a jerk before the entrance.

“ We have arrived !” The trooper was on his feet holding his hand to help Delphine down. “ Will the Presence descend ?” The Presence put a slim little hand in the strong dark one and leapt down as lightly as though eight hours in a tonga made stiffness unknown, and out from the shadowy house came Marguerite, a gracious vision in her muslin dress with its broad white fichu, and low-cut neck.

“ Delphine ! My dearest child, how good to see you ! I did not dream you would be here yet. And Pundita, too—how are you ?” She turned to the old woman with a kindly greeting, then gave her over to the charge of her own ayah, and took Delphine herself to the room she was to have; a little room full of roses with cool white furniture of simplest kind, and a bed invitingly white and ready. Marguerite spoke.

“ You must be dreadfully weary, and some tea and a bath is the first thing. Then if you like you shall either talk, or go straight to bed till tea time. Indeed, I think I shall insist on it, for you look dreadfully pale.”

“ I’m not a bit tired !” Delphine exclaimed, but a warm bath made her reconsider her opinion, and a half-hour later saw her ensconced among pillows drinking tea and eating toast while Marguerite sat beside her, listening to all the news.

Chapter III

“ DELPHINE, here is one of our oldest friends, Captain Gervase Wynnegate. Captain Wynnegate, my niece, Miss Molyneux.” Delphine swung round from a lively argument with her uncle, saw a tall well-built figure at Marguerite’s side and, holding out her hand, met the steady eyes.

“ How do you do ?” she said. “ Why—I’ve met you before ! You’re—you’re——”

She broke off, and into the flower-like pallor of her face crept the deep rose of sudden distress. Even before he could speak she dropped her hand.

“ I—I did not expect—such a meeting,” she said, and fell silent.

At her look of distress, at her sudden stammered words, the distaste Wynnegate had expected to feel died away; glancing round he saw that a corner over by Marguerite’s Bechstein grand was empty.

“ Shall we sit over there for a few moments ?” he suggested so quietly that to the girl it seemed he could not have noticed her discomfort. “ We are likely to see quite a good deal of one another, and it is impossible to talk in the middle of the room.”

She nodded, and as they moved across the room he tried to readjust his disturbed thoughts. That this was Hugh Molyneux’s daughter at all, so utterly different was she from the girl of nine years ago, was surprising enough; but what was stranger still was the fact that she remembered him, when she had but seen him twice for brief moments.

This evening he had come to the house immediately after mess, with Crawford and Desmond, a custom

Marguerite had inaugurated when her husband was too tired to want guests for dinner itself. Delphine, contrary to her expectations, had slept practically all day, had ridden down to the lines with Marguerite to see the tent-pegging between tea and dinner, and now, at half-past nine, was the centre of attraction in Marguerite's drawing-room. She was even more disturbed by the unexpected meeting with Wynnegate than he, and now, as they sat down together on the low couch by the piano, she had to make a great effort to conquer the conflicting emotion it had caused.

Wynnegate saw that, for some reason, she was not quite at her ease and, with the consideration that made him so universally liked, proceeded to talk of commonplaces about Kala Ismail Khan that needed no reply, till he saw the distressed colour had gone from her face.

Then, master of the agitation that had both annoyed and frightened her, he spoke:

"How stupid of me to be so taken aback!" she said, looking frankly at him. "It was your face brought back unexpected memories. You heard, I expect, that my mother, whom you were attending, died only a year later?"

Wynnegate's face was white under its bronze, but he spoke quietly enough.

"No. I had not heard. I left London some few months after—attending her. I am sorry!"

"It—it was not a case for sorrow," she said very low. "It was a release. I don't know why I am speaking of it. I suppose because I remembered when I saw you."

"I am amazed that you recognised me," Wynnegate said, voicing his feelings with sudden frankness. "You were such a child, and we only met for a couple of minutes."

She moved suddenly, bending over to smell the great bunch of Maréchal Niel roses on a little table close by.

"Yes, I remembered," she said briefly, and buried her face in the fragrant petals. When she raised it the seriousness had gone and her eyes were laughing.

"How gloomy I'm being!" she exclaimed, "and in reality I'm wildly excited. It seems too good to be true to be here at last. I've wanted to see the Frontier for years and years, and when Uncle Fred was appointed Settlement Officer to this district, I simply *made* daddy let me come to India, on condition that I paid a dutiful visit to Uncle Bruce—General Molyneux, you know. By the way, please enlighten me. What is a settlement officer?"

Another voice answered her, and she glanced up to see Howard himself close beside her.

"Uncle! how you startled me. Now please explain what you are."

"It's much too weighty a topic for after dinner," Howard protested. "Wynnegate will tell you some other time. Why I strolled over was to inform you that you are requested to sing."

"To sing? Certainly. What kind of thing, uncle?"

Wynnegate was a little amused by her alacrity and by the absence of all the excuses that most people make. Loving music very sincerely and having a sound knowledge to back his love, he hoped her performance would not be too amateurish and, crossing over to a further corner of the room where he could see her, prepared to criticise in his usual severe manner.

Marguerite, who played well, sat down to accompany her and, as she took her place, the buzz of talk died down and the men turned to watch her in delight at this unlooked-for entertainment. As it happened, not one of the eight women in Kala Ismail Khan sang.

Delphine opened the music for Marguerite, then cast a glance over her audience.

“‘How Fair this Spot,’ Rachmaninoff,” she announced, and Wynnegate wondered fearfully if the clear musical tones of her speaking voice would disappear, as so often such tones did, when she should sing.

He did not know the song, or its exceeding difficulty, but as the first notes sounded his unconsciously tightened nerves relaxed and he leant comfortably back against the wall. Here was no cheaply effective ballad singing, but real music. Whoever had taught Delphine had not only been a great artist, but also a great master. The voice itself was not remarkable, but training and musicianship had made it exquisite to listen to; the words were as clear as the smooth pure notes, and behind the technique of both was a rare power of interpretation. The song was all too brief and, as if she were used to the storm of eager applause she received, she sang another immediately—a little seventeenth-century French love song with a lilt that set everyone longing to join in. She sang half a dozen things before they would let her stop, and when, at last, she did, Wynnegate went over and made one of the little court that gathered about her.

“By Jove!” it was Wilde’s eager young voice that was speaking as he joined the group. “That was absolutely topping! Just about as different from the stuff one usually hears as can be. You must be awfully clever at it.”

Delphine’s brown eyes danced at this explanation of her performance, and, as if by instinct, met Wynnegate’s.

“I’m no untaught genius, I assure you!” she said, laughing. “If I could tell you quite how hard I have worked you would be astonished. I’m glad the result is so satisfactory.”

"It was beautiful, dear," Howard said quietly, laying his hand for a moment on her slight shoulder. "A rare joy to us in these wilds. Though real music is rare anywhere."

She flashed a quick look at him, and put up her hand for a moment over his.

"You dear!" she said, her voice very soft. "Such appreciation is a very great reward for one's work."

"Your fear should be that we shall work you too hard, Miss Molyneux," Crawford said, and skilfully interposed his large and handsome self between her and her importunate group of admirers. "You don't know what you've done. There are drinks just in. Do let me get you something, and then let us find some corner away from all these infants"—he cast a cheerily scornful look on the subalterns—"and discuss—art—and other things."

"With pleasure. Lemonade, please!" and, laughing in reply to some further remark, she went off with him, leaving the others disconsolate.

Almost unconsciously Wynnegate watched her; several times he told himself it was incredible that she could be one and the same with the plain sulky child he had seen. Slender, of medium height, there was something fascinatingly boyish about Delphine—a gallant little air very attractive. Her features were not particularly good, but the mouth was tender and humorous, and the brown eyes eager and frank; and her expression so vital that that alone arrested attention. Her hair was no longer drawn tightly back from her face, but was cut short like a medieval Florentine page's, a dusky mop waving about brow and ears, just escaping the shoulders. Her clothes—Wynnegate was quite man of the world enough to appreciate good dressing—were exceedingly simple, and, consequently, exceedingly smart, with the simplicity that only the

wealthy can afford. A very different matter to the unbecoming garments she had worn during her mother's lifetime. Her mother—Wynnegate felt a little stab of horror thrill his nerves as he realised what that fact meant.

He had left England too soon after that fatal night in Brook Street to know quite certainly Mrs. Molynieux's fate, but not before he had learnt from Salmon that it was absolutely inexorable; Delphine's hurried words had further enlightened him. And this girl was her daughter; carried in her the germ of the fell horror that had blighted three lives. Somewhere in that virile young form a deadly poison lurked, waiting, always waiting, for a chance to develop.

The thought was horrible. Even as it rested in his mind her gay laugh floated across the room, clear and ringing as a child's. Did she know? he wondered. Did the horror of it sometimes cloud her soul and send it down to utter darkness. Surely she knew her mother's fate—had she not said as much? But, perhaps, it conveyed nothing to her. Perhaps its true nature had not dawned upon her mind. It were more merciful if not—provided one almost inevitable contingency did not arrive. If it did, then tragedy lay in wait—the tragedy of blighted hope and youth condemned to unfulfilment and loneliness. Even if not actually hereditary—and Wynnegate was modern enough to admit the bare possibility held by some of his profession that no actual germ can be transmitted to the next generation—there was a history of insanity in the family that must inevitably transmit if not the germ, then the capacity. And that, in view of the future, was enough. The contemplation of such things was painful. With an impatient movement he went over to the piano and began looking through the pile of music placed there, when suddenly Howard,

who had been out of the room, came back with a look that made those who noticed stop talking.

"Hullo! What's happened?" Ruthven exclaimed.
"Trouble abroad?"

"There's been a raid on the hospital, and Muhammed Ali and his son have been found murdered in their house and the house itself plundered. I thought I heard firing while my niece was singing, and I've just had the news brought to me. The police are out, but the robbers have got away miles by this time, I expect."

"Oh, Fred! More work hunting them out," Marguerite exclaimed, "and poor old Muhammed Ali! He was rather a friend of mine."

"Better get the C.O. to send a detachment after 'em, sir," Wilde suggested. "The police'll never do it if they're our old friends the Zakha Khels. Get him to send me up!"

"Place aux—seniors," Crawford returned. "Needn't think you'll get all the plums, my friend. Poor old Muhammed. He was a dirty old scoundrel, but I liked him."

"So did I. If they don't take any of 'em before noon to-morrow I'll ask the Colonel. But it's tricky work."

"Yes. The job is to prove anything. They're as slippery as eels."

"Who was Muhammed Ali?"

It was Delphine's voice, for, unnoticed by Howard, she had joined the group about her uncle.

"He was a wealthy merchant and money-lender," Wynnegate said. "Lived near the hospital. I'm sorry about that. It means all the more work for you, Howard."

Howard made some rejoinder and moved away, and Delphine uttered a little exclamation of excitement.

"You haven't time to grow dull here, have you?"

she said, addressing no one in particular. "I imagined things happened like this, but not quite so brutally. I thought it was all just fighting."

"A good deal of it is," Crawford assured her, "but lately we've had a lot of trouble with the fellows out east from here in a place called the Bajar Valley. They are a rotten lot, and we shall probably have to punish 'em severely before we get 'em quiet. However, there's no need to worry you with that, Miss Molyneux. It may settle down, and at all events won't be anything to do with your aunt and uncle."

Delphine made no answer, and Crawford, thinking she was not interested, changed the conversation and began telling her quaint anecdotes about the place, its customs and the picturesque wildness of its inhabitants, till good-nights were said and, one by one, the visitors departed.

It was late by the time Delphine closed her bedroom door, but even so she did not go at once to bed, instead, she slipped out of her frock into a dressing-gown, lit a cigarette, and curled up at the foot of her bed with her back to the wall. Her medley of thoughts required disentangling and putting to rights. Till she had in some way done this, sleep was out of the question, and she made no attempt to seek it. Instead, she deliberately sent her thoughts back nine and a half years to occurrences that, unlike Wynnegate, she had not striven to forget.

She had not been a happy child; her mother's selfish absorption in every kind of pleasure had given her no chance to enjoy the normal happiness of childhood, and she looked back at those years with a kind of horror. Her only joy had been her devotion to her father, but even that was spoiled by her mother's furious outbursts of jealous temper; outbursts that had grown more frequent and more violent as time

passed by. Then, one never-to-be-forgotten day, Gervase Wynnegate had come to the house, had seen her for a brief moment, and all her starved young affections and the romantic ideas that almost every young girl possesses had centred on the famous surgeon. He was good to look at, and famous; a new type and a new interest in Delphine's dull life. Henceforward, unknown to anyone, least of all to Wynnegate himself, she had looked forward with feverish interest to his coming, had treasured every moment spent—all too rarely—in his company, had watched him leave the house from her attic schoolroom window and longed and hoped for his return. It made no difference that when they did meet he hardly noticed her. Why should he? A child's devotion is an unreasoning thing, and at sixteen Delphine had been a child. Then came tragedy. Wynnegate's visits suddenly ceased. Her mother went down into the country and spent long weeks out of town, first in one place then in another. Whispers among the servants came to her ears. She learned of the suspected cause of Mrs. Molyneux's illness, and, horror-stricken, left childhood behind her. Her father, unapproachable and hard, protected his outraged life behind a colossal pride, and Delphine faced facts. A month after she had learned of the true state of her mother's health she read a brief paragraph in the *Times* that stunned her. Mr. Gervase Wynnegate, the famed surgeon, had given up his practice in London and offered his services to the Indian Government, which was just sending an expeditionary force into Tirah. He had been granted honorary rank as captain, and would accompany the expedition for purposes of research and experiment. The Indian Government were highly appreciative of the services of so valuable a man, etc., etc. That brief statement had put out all the light in Delphine's

young life; had her surroundings been normal she would in the first place have been more reasonable over Wynnegate, and, in the second, have speedily got over any childish infatuation. But they were not normal, and by reason of sheer loneliness and the shadow of tragedy, Delphine had brooded and dreamed till his personality obsessed her.

A brief attack of pneumonia, brought on by an aggravated chill, had awakened Molyneux to the unhealthy life his daughter was living. Rousing himself from the work to which he had resorted in desperation, he took her away for three months, invited young people, handed her over to his sister-in-law to be formally brought out, and took care that her future should be very different to her past.

Luckily she possessed plenty of good sense and the resilient powers of youth. Under such changed conditions she altered almost daily, and, in a few months, became a normal girl with a capacity for enjoyment and a temperament of extraordinary vitality. Life began to cast its sunshine instead of its shadow on her path, and she was like a different creature.

Mrs. Molyneux's illness developed rapidly during the last month or two of her life, but Lady Cynthia Molyneux kept this from Delphine's knowledge, and it came as a relief rather than as a shock to the girl to learn that her mother had died suddenly in a nursing home.

For two years she lived more or less in the care of her uncle at Aldershot, Brigadier-General Bruce Molyneux, or in London, and periodically on the Continent. Then, a chance concert revealed to her her musical desires, and she entered on a course of serious study which, for five years, absorbed her. From thence onward, there was nothing unusual in life to upset or worry her, and no great change

came till Brigadier-General Molyneux went out to India, and she went out a year later, and just six months ago, to visit him.

But all these years she had never forgotten Gervase Wynnegate, and now, face to face with him once more, she realised with a shock of mingled dismay and gladness that time had merely sufficed to change the romantic devotion of her childhood to an interest so keen and a joy so great that she was frightened. Sitting there alone, watching the smoke curl slowly upward, she faced facts with her usual courage. Her interest in this man was no fleeting one, and the last three hours had deepened it amazingly. He had altered—she loved the alteration, seeing in it a strengthening and ennobling where before there had been mere good looks. If he had been worthy of her devotion, then he was infinitely more worthy now.

Delphine knocked out the end of her cigarette from the holder—fingers mechanical, eyes remote, slipped down from the bed and stood a moment gazing unseeingly with wide-open brown eyes into the dusk.

“So that’s it, is it?” she said very softly, finding an odd relief in speech. “I am in love at last.”

The avowal caused her no embarrassment, that odd little streak of boyishness made her unusually frank, both with herself and with others. It was a fact. Why fear to acknowledge it? But she was woman enough to realise that it must mean suffering as well as joy and might mean lasting grief. Slowly she began to undress, and her last waking thought was characteristic, though she did not know it—a half-formed, half-articulate prayer.

“Whether he loves me or not—whether he ever knows or not—let me have the chance to serve him.”

Chapter IV

MARGUERITE HOWARD was involved in that occupation that housekeepers in India, and especially in Indian frontier stations, know so well, the ordering of a dinner when expected stores have not arrived and the resources of the native bazaar can be contemplated only as a choice of evils. The dining-room at the bungalow was still cool, for it was early in the day, and opposite her in an attitude of humble patience stood her butler, Zyarulla.

The contrast was one to delight an artist.

The woman, tall, statuesque, beautiful with the beauty of ancient Greece, her red-gold hair classically knotted, the exquisite freshness of her skin unharmed by the cruel Punjab sun, in her dress of rose-sprigged white muslin. The man in white jacket and blue-trousers, with snowy white turban crowning his dark aquiline face, with its dusky eyes and beard, and expression of grave dignity. Zyarulla had been with Marguerite since her marriage, and was the most trusted servant they possessed.

Dignified, reserved, honourable, he was a man in a thousand, even in that land of excellent servants, and in sixteen years had come to be treated more as a faithful friend than entirely as a butler.

Marguerite spoke the vernacular fluently, which was one of the reasons why she was served so well, and in addition she was possessed of a rare sense of justice and more than the ordinary share of tact.

She knew the virtue of being able to ignore the more venial faults, of what to reprove and what to pass over, and in Zyarulla she had an assistant worth

his weight in gold. Now, when after much cogitation and discussion they had decided how best to serve a pleasant meal from tough fowls, fruit on the verge of spoiling, and tinned soups left over from the last supply of "emergency rations," Zyarulla, instead of departing, salaamed humbly and stood waiting. For a moment Marguerite did not notice him, but continued checking the various items in her housekeeping books, then, suddenly aware that he had not gone, she looked up.

"Why, Zyarulla! What is it? Do you wish to speak to me?"

The man salaamed again, fixing his clear dark eyes on those of his mistress.

"If the Presence will deign to listen."

Marguerite put down her pen and moved away to another chair.

"Speak freely, Zyarulla. Is anything troubling you?"

A look of distress that he would have been too proud to let anyone else observe crossed the old man's face.

"My memsahib is right. There is much troubling me. Will she that I speak freely of what is in my breast?"

She nodded.

"Yes, quite freely," she said, and wondered a little, for he was not given to either grumbling or idle fears.

"Then, beloved excellency, it is for one who is dear to my sahib and to yourself. I speak of Wynnegate sahib. He has enemies in these baseborn hill murderers. Those that murdered Muhammed Ali last week desire also to murder him. They are on the watch for unguarded moments or lonely ways. Ask me not how I know this, for I cannot tell. Gossip came to my ears in the bazaar so late as yesterday.

but before then I was sure. The knowledge came to me as the wind across the fields. I know not whither. Yet am I sure."

Marguerite's face had paled. She had respect for these strange intuitions.

"This is indeed ill to hear, Zyarulla. Do you wish me to speak to your master?"

"As your excellency thinks fit. If Wynnegate sahib would listen to anyone it would be to my memsahib or to my own sahib himself. This am I sure of. It is no idle talk."

Marguerite made no immediate reply. She guessed there was more to come, and she waited patiently. Wynnegate had saved the life of Zyarulla's only son, a trooper in Major Crawford's Sikhs, on the occasion of a raid from the other side the Border. Duffadar Assad Khan was an excellent soldier and a born fighter, as his people invariably are, and he had, too, the onus of carrying on one of the endless family feuds that continue from generation to generation and are as much a badge of respectability and even importance as the possession of a family tree may be in the Western lands.

Crawford had guessed in his own mind that during the expedition, which was merely a threat of wrath to come if behaviour did not improve and was over in a week, Assad Khan had taken the opportunity to add one to his score on his own account. Certain it was that he was shot through the head in broad daylight on the return journey, not a quarter of a mile from the walled fort that did duty as a home for Zyarulla's hereditary enemies. Assad Khan had ridden off with another trooper in search of water, and his companion had galloped for help when the murder was attempted. Wynnegate, being the best mounted, had reached the scene of action first, not five minutes

before the murderers who were galloping out from their village to attend to Assad Khan in their customary and sanguinary manner.

Wynnegate's headlong arrival down the valley had put them out in their reckoning, and they had checked their mad rush as best they could. It was too far off for the approaching troopers' fire to be effective, and, for a moment or two, it looked as though Wynnegate would share in Assad Khan's fate. But these particular villagers, furious as they were at such baulking of their legitimate desires, hesitated to shoot down a white officer in cold blood. Such doings had a tiresome way of bringing vengeance out of all proportion to the crime. Reluctantly they wheeled their hardy ponies and bolted for home, but not before their leader had marked Wynnegate down as the cause of their defeat. A fact to be "filed for future reference."

Part of this story was known to Marguerite; all of it to Zyarulla. Contrary to expectations, Assad Khan had lived, and neither he nor his father forgot that the Captain Sahib had risked his life to save him.

So it came about that Zyarulla, having debated long on the wisdom of speech, now laid the whole story before his beloved mistress, and, when it was ended, stood awaiting her pleasure, totally unconscious as she was that a third person had entered by the curtained doorway from the drawing-room and had overheard all.

Delphine did not understand the vernacular, but she was quick enough to observe the signs of agitation in the old man's tones, coupled to the constant mention of Wynnegate sahib. Not moving, she stood by the curtains till the end of the recital; then, slipping through, she went over to the further end of the drawing-

room and, dropping down in a low chair, awaited Marguerite's arrival in feverish anxiety. When she entered twenty minutes later, Delphine started up.

"Marguerite"—by mutual wish between them she had dropped the courtesy title—"what was Zyarulla saying about Captain Wynnegate?"

Marguerite paused, her hands full of the flowers she had just gathered, startled by the vehemence of the question.

"My dear—what makes you ask?" she exclaimed at last. "Did you come in?"

"Yes. To speak to you, and I found him with you. Is Captain Wynnegate's life threatened?" There was a throb in her voice that lit the lamp of understanding in Marguerite's heart. For a moment she did not reply, considering the case; then, laying her flowers on the table, she sat down by Delphine's side.

"Not quite that," she said. "But I have been hearing a rather curious story from Zyarulla, who, I know, is to be trusted implicitly in his word to us. I will repeat it to you, but, of course, you will keep your own counsel regarding it."

Delphine nodded.

"Of course. Go on."

She listened in complete silence while Marguerite related what the old Pathan had told her. Then, when the recital was ended, spoke in some perplexity.

"I had always read that these Frontier tribesmen bore no malice in that way," she said. "That they fought, conquered, or took their punishment for the mere sake of fighting, bearing no ill-will whichever side is temporarily the winner."

"That is very usually true, but there are exceptions, and these Zakha Khels are the great one. They are a very treacherous tribe, with the worst

features of about half a dozen of their neighbours and none of their virtues. I shall talk to Captain Wynnegate, of course, but I don't suppose he'll take much notice. And, after all, it's no more than any man expects. This is a place where human life is held cheaply. Still, he is not a reckless boy, so he will not run foolish risks, I am sure. And don't look so worried, Delphine."

"I like Captain Wynnegate—better than any other man here. I hate to think of him as the victim of treachery."

Marguerite, who had risen at the conclusion of Zyarulla's story to begin the arrangement of her flowers, glanced for the moment at Delphine's grave face.

"So do I, dear. So should we all. Gervase is a man in a thousand. But every man out here must face certain risks—yes, and we women too, and it's no good worrying before those risks eventuate. Enjoy your friendship while you can, and do not pay too much heed to threats which will probably never be anything more than words."

Delphine nodded.

"I will not be foolish," she said, with a faint little smile. "I suppose the novelty of Frontier life makes me a little more credulous than I should be. Let me help you with those flowers. How lovely they are!"

"The very last," Marguerite said regretfully. "It's getting too hot for them now. In another week or two we shall have to think about the Hills."

"You and Fred?"

"For a month. Civilians only get a month's leave."

"And the others—soldiers—get three?"

"Yes. Fred is arranging to take his early. The

last week of May. And then we can leave you comfortably established somewhere for the rest of the time."

Delphine turned swiftly, a spray of scarlet hibiscus uplifted between her fingers, her dark eyes opening widely.

"Marguerite! *What do you mean?*"

"What I say, dear. Do you suppose we are going to let you grill down here just because Fred only gets a month's leave?"

"And do *you* suppose I am going to stay comfortably in the Hills while you stew in Kala Ismail Khan? How absurd!"

Marguerite bent and kissed the indignant face before her.

"We'll argue that out later," she said. "Meanwhile, before it gets too hot, would you like to ride to the native town as I promised you? We can be back before it's too blazing."

"Rather. I'll fly and change now if you order the horses!" and Wynnegate and Hills forgotten alike, she fled off to her room to emerge fifteen minutes later in buff linen habit and breeches, more slender and boyishly alluring than ever. As they stood for a moment on the verandah awaiting the horses, the mali's four-year-old son trotted into sight. A small brown chubby figure, some drooping marigolds between his fat little hands, his tiny rotund figure attired in a shirt of blue and white check. At the sight of the latter, Delphine chuckled.

"That shirt is obviously new," she said. "It reminds me—"

"Of my new blue-bordered glass cloths. Delphine, you have perspicacity. I had missed those glass cloths for a fortnight, as I told you."

"Shall you say anything?"

Marguerite shook her head.

"No," she said, smiling. "That shall be one of the occasions when I am conveniently blind. My mali is an excellent gardener and wouldn't let a rose be stolen, let alone fruit and vegetables, by anyone but himself. Besides, the baby really looks delightful!"

"It's a duck! Look at that bulging little tummy and those staggering fat legs! These brown babies are really most attractive. Oh, here are the horses. What a darling 'Blossom' is."

"Blossom," the bay mare given over to Delphine's use, was a light slim creature, with an intelligent head, fired hocks, and perfect manners. She was sure-footed as a cat, but her weight-carrying powers were slight, and she was useless to either Marguerite or Fred.

A couple of native police would escort them when actually within the native city, but they were alone now, and Delphine asked a thousand questions as they trotted first under the welcome shade of the trees, then out into the sunshine beyond. Already in the fields the farmers gathered their scanty harvest, and the wide view of gently rolling land was tinged with brown and yellow where the sun was already scorching every atom of vegetation. In the distance the heat-haze was beginning to shimmer, and the conglomeration of mud buildings ahead of them looked like so many ovens. It was a relief to glance northward to the far-distant line of glittering snow—and Delphine found herself longing to explore their wonderful unknown heights.

Kala Ismail Khan was an untidy tangle of huts just like all the other native cities of that part of the world, but it was novel enough to Delphine, and she was delighted with the noisy smelly bazaar.

There was not much to buy. The Frontier bazaars in the villages are not rich in curios; even Peshawur, where the knowledgeable can obtain real and almost priceless treasures, is not an easy place in which to purchase anything of great value, for it is a dangerous pleasure to wander there through the crowded native city.

One incident interested Delphine enormously, and that was the sight of a professional storyteller, a rare sight now, outside Afghanistan itself, seated in the shade of a house and relating some story to a group of eager listeners. The audience, composed of men of various ages and a few boys, were roaring with laughter over some jest, and even the two native policemen acting as escort grinned appreciatively behind their memsahib's back. Delphine, listening to the delighted laughter and applause, turned an eager glance to her companion.

"They sound so jolly. I wish I could understand what he's saying!" she said, and Marguerite lifted her brows.

"I think you may be very glad you don't," she said. "A Pathan sense of humour is not for the likes of us, my child! They like their jokes to be of full-flavoured Rabelaisian quality. I know the vernacular quite well enough to suggest that we ride straight by."

Delphine laughed.

"They are deliciously naïve for all their fierceness," she said, "and they fascinate me as studies of human nature. I wish I could sketch, too. Captain Ruthven's old Sikh resaldar is a perfect joy to the eye in that huge queer-shaped blue and gold turban he wears. It would be a wonderful country for an artist and nobody touches it."

"I suppose life is too strenuous up here, but I've

wondered the same myself. Here we are out on the other side of the city. We'll turn south here, and skirt it, and ride back this way if you're not too tired."

They rode at an easy pace along the sun-baked track that here did duty for a road, and presently saw two figures on horseback coming across country to meet them. Marguerite's eyes lit up.

"It's Fred and Captain Wynnegate," she said, and putting their horses to a canter, they rapidly approached.

It was some days since Delphine and Wynnegate had met, but there was already a friendship established between them, so that they gravitated naturally towards one another when they found themselves in the company of others. Now Wynnegate checked his waler to a quieter pace of the bay mare, and Delphine told him of their visit to the native city.

"Where have you and Fred been?" she added as she ended her description.

"Over to the hospital. That building over there." He pointed with his riding-whip. "I am trying to get a grant to enlarge it and provide some much-needed apparatus."

"A difficult matter, isn't it?"

"Very. You say that sympathetically."

Delphine's lips quivered in an odd little smile.

"My father is at the Treasury. My uncle on the staff. Sir William Ewartson has been known to me for some years. I've a certain acquaintance with the official mind, and I think your efforts praiseworthy, but condemned to failure."

"Don't say that," Wynnegate exclaimed. "Because it is a serious matter. If we get any big outbreak of plague or cholera, things will be pretty bad. And it's not here only."

" You mean it's the same all over India ? Yes, I judged so. Before we came north I saw something of Calcutta and the work there and elsewhere. Then I was, by way of contrast, taken over the hospital Sir Pertab Singh has established. It was rather dreadful to compare what our so-called civilisation thinks of preventive medicine. The other—Sir Pertab Singh's—was a magnificent place. Great airy wards, tiled operating theatre, perfect equipment, every kind of modern apparatus—rooms for electrical treatment, light rooms—everything. It was a monument of efficiency and patriotism." She had spoken with some heat; the subject was one near her heart, and Wynnegate was amazed and delighted; he was not used to hearing such views unless he himself voiced them, and the realisation that here was a kindred spirit was like water in a thirsty land. The horses checked to a walk, breasting the gentle slope to the cantonment, and he turned towards her, an eagerness in his eyes long since strange to them.

" What makes you understand so well ?" he asked. For a moment she did not answer, but looked straight between her mare's ears, lips pressed together, all the youth and eager vitality struck out of her face. Before her, blotting out the sunshine, separating her from friends and all the warm comradeship of daily life, was the spectre that lurked in the background of her life, the dread presence that seemed to her ever lurking and watching. When at last she forced herself to reply her voice was level and expressionless.

" Perhaps I have more reason than most to realise the importance of scientific discoveries in medicine."

It was Wynnegate's turn to be silent, and he bit his lips fiercely, furious with himself for his tactlessness in having asked the question. Yet he was conscious of surprise, too. It had not occurred to him that she

would herself understand the tragedy of her heritage. He had thought of it for her during the last ten days; first as a doctor, then as a friend, but this aspect of affairs was new to him. He realised, too, that there was no mistake. The look on her face precluded all possibility of that. For once he was at a loss, and they rode on in silence till they reached the bungalow; then Delphine spoke, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Please don't reproach yourself for having asked that question," she said. "It was so very natural. You thought I did not know—I have known for eight years. Some day I should like to ask you a question or two. Should you mind?"

"I will answer them to the utmost of my ability," he said. "I shall be honoured by your confidence."

She made a little sign of assent and pulled her horse round to give Marguerite room to pass. Marguerite, however, pulled up.

"Fred tells me he is going over to the Irrigation Canal Camp with you," she said. "It's an unofficial visit, isn't it? He's going to take the afternoon off."

He drew aside to answer her, and, when he had done so, Delphine had gone indoors, and, riding back to the mess for lunch, he tried to forget the despair he had seen momentarily on the face that was already beginning to haunt his sleeping hours.

Mess was just over that evening when suddenly through the quiet night there rang the sound of a rifle shot, startlingly loud in the silence. Crawford glanced at Colonel Houghton.

"Another poor devil trying to get past the sentries," he said. "I wonder—"

What he wondered did not transpire, for another shot rang out, followed by a sudden fusillade from the direction of the west. Houghton leapt to his feet, but before he could reach the door there were hurried

footsteps without and a confusion of sounds and voices clearly heard through the wire screening. The next instant a corporal appeared, breathless and a trifle dishevelled.

"Beg pardon, sir, but the officer of the day sent me up to report a raid on the camp. I was to tell you there are bonfires to the north-west. Guard turned out, sir."

"Right. Tell Sergeant MacCormack I'm coming."

Off went the man, out went the Colonel, and in two minutes the room was empty, while a group of eager men focussed their attention on the low foothills to the right, where, sure enough, four different points of light indicated four signal fires.

From the outlying camp, half a mile away, near the cavalry lines, came the sound of firing and the racket of suddenly attacked men, and the Colonel and his senior officers were off as quickly as their servant could bring their eager horses to them.

Wynnegate dashed off through the purple dusk to his bungalow to get what he needed, and found the whole station roused, and Marguerite Howard's guests—two or three men had been dining there as usual—struggling with belts and revolvers, Desmond amongst them.

Delphine had been singing in the lamp-lit drawing-room, but now she, too, was on the verandah, a slim white-clad figure beside Marguerite, and just as Wynnegate cantered past on his waler Desmond rushed up to them.

"It's a raid from Chora way, mother. May be serious, or may not. Anyway, we're off. Don't worry. We'll probably be back before daylight."

He gave her a hasty kiss and ran off again, hot foot for his first taste of action, and Fred came out of one of the other doors.

" You'd better come in," he said. " The whole garrison is turning out, and there may be robbers prowling about. You can't have much light. Ram Ullah will sit outside this room with a rifle. I shall have to go down to the office. You won't be too anxious, dear?"

" Of course not. We shall be quite all right. Let us know how things are going on when you can."

" I will—good-bye."

He kissed her, patted Delphine's shoulder, and went off, leaving them alone, Delphine trembling a little with excitement. Beyond the compound could be heard the shouts of men and the snorting and tramping of horses mingled with the jingling and clanging of bits and weapons. Then came a combined clatter as the men moved off, the comforting noise growing fainter and fainter as they rode away.

At last all was still, and they were alone in the deserted bungalow save for the faithful Ram Ullah standing outside on the verandah, rifle in hand, keen eyes searching the darkness.

In the room only a small lamp burned, turned low and shaded by a screen from sending its beams into the outer world, and as neither Marguerite nor Delphine could work or read, the time threatened to hang heavily. Delphine had an insane desire to go to the piano, but was fortunately aware of its insanity, and lay back in a low chair gazing into the shadowy twilight. At first excitement held her tense; then, gradually, as time wore on, and the distant firing died right away, her thoughts passed to matters more intimately connected with herself. Since she had been at Kala Ismail Khan she had lived in a fool's paradise, delighting in Wynnegate's company, refusing to look at that which threatened. Was she to have none of the legitimate joys of love? Was her life to

be isolated, cut off from all that marriage can mean ? For no fault of hers she was to be punished, and rebellion flared in her soul. It was disgraceful that such was possible, that men and women should marry regardless of what heredity meant, of what vices and diseases they handed on to their children. The very animals knew better, and when men desire fine results in what they were pleased to call the lower creatures they selected and bred only of the best. Yet in the human world about her misery was rife because men and women became parents with no thought for anything but their own pleasure. Generally, in fact, by accident, annoyed at the bad luck they had encountered. She was too bitter, too intensely touched by the whole matter to be quite just, and, like all young things, was apt to hold the extreme views.

Marguerite glanced at her once or twice, but even in the shadow the girl's set face and brooding eyes did not invite conversation, and once more she turned to her own thoughts, while Delphine faced fact with uncompromising gaze.

Her meeting with Gervase Wynnegate had upset all the theories she had so carefully nurtured, and she was resentful even while she rejoiced. Long ago when she first realised what her mother had really been she had realised, too, the fact that she had no right to marry. Well, so be it—there were other interests. Music she had studied and loved, friends had been many and staunch; the memory of the one man who had attracted her had been only a memory, treasured but remote from everyday life. Now, suddenly, matters had changed; something had happened, and the only power that could have protected her—serious work at the beloved art—she could not by force of circumstances call upon. If she insisted on her right to live her own life, then she was but repeating the very

cruelty for which she so bitterly reproached her mother. Yet she loved this man and believed that in her lay the power to make him love her. Why, she did not know; he had given no sign of it, and yet she felt certain enough.

Was there no way out of the impasse? Certainly she could cable or write to her father suggesting that she was tired of India; he would at once tell her to come back. On the other hand, surely it was foolish to spoil what promised to be the most interesting experience of her life, quite apart from the society of Gervase Wynnegate. There was, of course, the possibility that she was disquieting herself in vain, that he did not love her, and never would. But a certain coldness at her heart warned her not to dwell on such a subject; that—miserably she confessed it—would be the worst of all.

So what remained to do? Duty and inclination pulled as ever, in opposite directions, and merciful sleep clouding brain and eyes closed for a time the one-sided argument.

An indefinite distant sound awoke her at last, and she started up to see Marguerite crossing the room; a moment later came the tramp of horses' feet and the pleasant chatter and confusion of returning troops. Apologetically she looked across the room.

"Margot! How horrid of me to sleep and leave you awake alone. Forgive me."

"I'm delighted you were so sensible, dear. We couldn't talk, so the best thing was to sleep. Here they are coming back. I must go and see about some food and drinks."

Five minutes later horses clattered into the compound. Men were dismounting in the faint dawn-light, and Crawford, Ruthven, and two or three others came in, and, between the two former, Desmond, walking a trifle unsteadily, one arm out of his tunic, bandaged and stained, rather white as to the face, and

extremely elated as to spirits, for had he not received his first wound on active service ?

Delphine cast one look at him, saw matters were not too serious, and fled in search of Marguerite.

“ Margot ”—she laid her hand on her arm as they met—“ there is nothing much. Desmond walked in very proud of himself as he had his shoulder hurt, so don’t be surprised if you see bandages or even some blood. So far nothing much has happened. Captain Wynnegate’s not back yet, so I suppose there are some injured. I’ll see after the things. Desmond’s sure to want you.”

Marguerite saw through the consideration that had prompted the flying visit and the casual tone. With a hasty word and a rather anxious smile she hurried off, and when Delphine came into the drawing-room ten minutes later it was to find a scene of hilarity, Desmond the hero of the hour, for it transpired that he had got a collar-bone broken by a bullet when endeavouring to carry back to safety a trooper shot in the leg.

Marguerite, far too wise a mother to make a fuss, but really both proud and immensely relieved, dispensed drinks and welcome, and, a few minutes later, in came Wynnegate, a trifle mud-stained and very hurried, having snatched time to report to her on her son’s condition before he went on to the hospital, whither the wounded were now being carried. He had only a moment or two, but before he hurried off he came over to Delphine.

“ You were not too startled, I hope,” he said, “ that’s the sort of thing that makes life interesting out here. Don’t let Mrs. Howard worry over the boy. He’s quite all right.”

Brief words, but giving great joy to Delphine, because of the glad pleasure in the eyes at seeing her again, because of what they told her, that her presence and well-being meant more to him than might be expressed.

Chapter V

AN enchanted valley high above the Plains, hemmed in by great mountains, snow-capped and mighty, carpeted with velvet turf, starred with flowers, and shaded by stately cedars and wide spreading plane-trees. Such was the valley in Kashmir, where the little colony from Kala Ismail Khan had taken up its summer quarters, and Delphine, after a long day's exploring with her uncle, was now lying comfortably back in a long chair waiting for the sunset.

It was just three weeks since they had left Kala Ismail Khan and journeyed hither, and to-night Wynnegate was expected to arrive with Crawford and Desmond, the latter long since recovered from his wound and eagerly looking forward to leave and shooting, and Fred had ridden down early in the morning to meet them at a rest-house ten miles from Srinagar.

The day had been a trifle misty, but with the advent of evening the clouds drifted away and now hung mistily over the more distant mountains, and Delphine, ardently sensitive to colour, lay back in her chair and watched almost breathlessly the changing splendour of snow and sky.

Westward the heavens were a blinding glory of rose and amber that stretched upward to the zenith, flecked here and there with flame, where the tiny cloudlets trailed across the gold, and the stainless purity of the eternal snows was a wonder of coral, amethyst, and carmine where the great peaks lifted themselves heavenward.

Second by second the colour was changing, deepening to a richer glow, flooding mountains and valleys,

trees and grass with its flood of splendour, and a little breeze born of the sunset and the dew wandered up from the tumbling stream that ran through the valley's end bearing on its breast faint whiffs of rose and honeysuckle.

It seemed to Delphine that colour could not reach a greater depth of beauty than that bathing earth and sky around her, and, rising suddenly to her feet, she leant on the little rough railing that hung at the edge of a rock, eyes wide, lips parted. Even as she watched, the carmine of the snow-peaks deepened to crimson, and for one moment the very mountains seemed on fire, then the glow faded, passing almost imperceptibly from lilac and amber to opal, and whitened suddenly to a glitter of ice beneath a sky of translucent green.

A sob rose in Delphine's throat even as a wild, passionate desire for the unfading beauty of the land that is very far off rose in her heart. All Nature rejoiced in purity and splendour, fulfilling His word; only she, the possessor of a God-given soul, was doomed to emptiness and disaster, forbidden to carry on life, forbidden to live as others, destined to loneliness, if not to horror unspeakable. The glow of the sky had faded and the swift Himalayan night was descending; already overhead the stars were rushing out of the obscurity, points of white fire in the velvet blue, and Delphine stood motionless fighting the resentment and misery that surged in her heart. It was so unfair—so unnecessary. Biting her lip, she forced back the stinging tears, and after a while she was herself again, able to cross the stretch of turf to the rough hut of cedar logs with steady step and head high. Lights were springing up dotted about the slope of meadow, where the occupants of other bungalows and huts were getting ready for dinner, and as she

approached "Cedar Cottage," as Marguerite had laughingly named their hut, the lamp-light streamed out on to the rough verandah, and the sound of voices and laughter came to her ears. Near by a little colony of tents had sprung up, for the Cedar Cottage only possessed three rooms—a sitting-room and two bedrooms, her own and Marguerite's. Tents therefore were ready for the expected guests, and Zyarulla had lit little lamps in each, that showed the scanty camp furniture ready for the wearied travellers.

It was so homelike, so intimate. Delphine stopped short, feeling for the moment unwanted and out of it all. Would the pain never cease, the longing for what she must forgo never die?

Then, as she raised her head, she saw away, far beyond the shadowy valley, a glittering line of snow peaks, silvery radiant in the light of a rising moon, and into her mind flashed the old words that have so often come to the lips of distracted humanity: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the Hills."

Marguerite came out as she approached, speaking to Zyarulla, who followed her with a white cloth over his arm for dinner, and, seeing Delphine, waved a telegram.

"Just come! Major Crawford is bringing—who d'you think?"

"Can't imagine," Delphine said, coming to a halt just outside the circle of lamp-light from the bungalow. "I never could guess anything, so please put me out of misery."

"Your brother—Torquil."

"Torquil—Torquil—" Delphine reiterated the name in amazement. "But how, why—"

"My dear, here's the wire. I know no more than you do."

"When I heard last, Torquil was in London. What

can have happened? Certainly he hasn't written for six months. We're not, as a family, given to correspondence. How odd. It's rather nice, though."

Having come to this conclusion, she went in to get ready for dinner, her thoughts luckily distracted somewhat from her own affairs, and as she brushed the dusky mop of hair, that gave such charming character to her face, she heard the sound of voices and laughter, Fred's call to his wife and Marguerite's eager welcome in reply.

Her pulses quickened, and for a moment the brush paused in its office. Then, with a little resolute tightening of her lips, she finished her toilet and went out on to the verandah. Wynnegate's tent, as luck would have it, was the one pitched nearest to her room, not more than thirty yards away across the turf, and, as she came on to the verandah, she saw him emerge from his tent.

Constraint she felt would be fatal. Difficult as she found it to be quite natural, she forced herself to leave the verandah and go across to him.

"How d'you do, Captain Wynnegate? Have you had a good ride up? I'm so pleased to see you."

He came swiftly towards her and shook hands, aware that pleasure was a mild term for the joy he felt in seeing her once again.

"Yes, thanks, splendid. How are you? Is all well?"

"Absolutely. Isn't this a jewel of a place? I've never been up here before, you know, and its beauty leaves me breathless. The colour of the flowers and the green meadows and the skies—it's truly an enchanted glade."

"I knew you'd appreciate it when I heard you were coming. Here is Mrs. Howard—and dinner. I'm absolutely starving!"

"So am I!" Delphine confessed. "By the way, isn't my brother's arrival a funny coincidence? We've only just had Major Crawford's wire."

"Your brother?" Wynnegate stopped short, staring at her in the moonlight. "What d'you mean? I thought Crawford was here ahead of me."

"We thought he was with you. Isn't he?"

"Certainly not. But your brother?"

"My brother is with him. Torquil. It's very odd altogether. Margot just had a wire to say that Major Crawford was bringing my brother—who I thought was in England—with him up here."

"Dinner's ready, good people." Fred's voice interrupted them as he came strolling out of the hut. "Delphine, all our guests have not yet arrived. Desmond is here. Came up with Captain Wynnegate, but neither Torquil nor Crawford have arrived."

"I suppose they're staying at Srinagar," Margot said as she took her place at the table, and talk became general as dinner progressed; a delightful meal taken on a rough camp table set on the broad verandah lit by candles that burnt steadily beneath their pink shades, so windless was the night. Outside the radius of the table-lights the night lay in a mystery of black and silver over the meadow and stately trees, the moon hidden behind the hut's steeply sloping roof; while here and there in the shadowy distance seen through the black slenderness of pine stems, or beyond the flat darkness of the cedars, tiny points of red fire showed where torches lit some unseen passer-by going to dinner to some distant bungalow.

When the meal was over, Zyarulla folded up the table and took it away, placing a stool for the reception of the coffee-tray, and they all moved to the group of canvas chairs ready for them at a little distance.

Delphine dropped into one rather on the outskirts

of the little circle, and Wynnegate drew his to her side; then came coffee and cigarettes, and she uttered a little exclamation of delight.

"Margot, how dared you bring these lovely little green cups up here? But they are perfect. I do so appreciate unexpected luxuries and daintinesses when one is really living the simple life."

She looked admiringly at the little Rockingham cup she held, and then to the silver cigarette-box and silver coffee-pot standing on the tray.

"It enhances it all somehow," she said, "the trees and the mountains—look, you can just see the snow where the moonlight is on it."

"You are like the Socialists," Fred said lazily from the depths of his comfortable chair. "They like to discuss Socialism and terrors of wealth, in the Savoy over Perrier Jouet and *Vive Cliquot*. It's the law of contrast, I suppose."

"Don't be sarcastic," Delphine returned. "I'm sure Margot and Captain Wynnegate understand me. It's like the smell of the coffee—which makes the lovely fragrance of cedar-wood and dewy grass all the more exquisite!"

"You little materialist!" Fred retorted. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Hullo—horses! It must be the missing guests."

He was right, and a minute or two later Crawford joined the group, and with him came a tall young man, very pale and very handsome, who greeted Fred and Margot, was introduced to Wynnegate, and then turned to his sister.

"How d'you do, Delphine? Something of a surprise, am I not?"

"More than something," she said. "What has happened? Why are you here? I imagined you were in England."

"So I was. I'll tell you another time. Anyhow I've a week's leave, and Kashmir seemed the best place to spend it."

"I'm sure it is." Even in the moonlight Delphine could see how white and worn his face appeared, and, being possessed of plenty of tact, she asked no more questions, but became severely practical.

"You look very tired. Go and have some food, and then come out here and rest. It's heavenly. Margot, they've not fed."

"I know. Come along both of you and have something immediately. I don't know what Zyarulla will be able to do, but it'll be better than nothing. And there's excellent coffee."

The two travellers followed her willingly and, as Fred and his son were in deep conversation over some problem or other, Wynnegate turned to Delphine.

"Shall we stroll down to the river while they are feeding? There's a particularly lovely spot that I know of old. But your shoes—I forgot. They're probably too thin."

"Not in the least!" Delphine assured him, serenely indifferent to the magnitude of the lie. "How far is it?"

"Only a couple of hundred yards or so. The view from there is beautiful."

Cigarettes lighted, they strolled away, across level turf of the meadow starred with flowers all closed for the night, followed a narrow path carpeted in pine-needles, passed through a little clump of the pines themselves, and emerging from the shadow came out on a great ledge of rock overhanging the racing shallows of the river.

Wynnegate spread the mackintosh he had carried, and which puzzled Delphine by its presence, and looked at her.

"Shall we sit awhile? That will prevent any damp or soiling of your frock."

"How good of you! Indeed we will, and talk of 'cabbages and kings.' What a heavenly spot! I'd not discovered it."

"Yes. Night or day it's beautiful, and no one seems to have found it but me. I was up here for a few days last summer, on my way to Sulmarg."

"I didn't know that. It is a relief after Kala Ismail Khan. How were things there? Have you had any reply to your last demand for the hospital wards?"

"No. None yet. I begin to think they're doomed."

"It's serious, though, isn't it?"

"It will be serious if we get any kind of outbreak. Of course, things may go all right, and then the official mind can pat itself on the back and say, 'I told you so!' On the other hand——" A shrug of the shoulders completed the sentence.

"Is it the same all over India?"

"Very largely—not, of course, quite so bad in some ways. For instance, there's a magnificent hospital at Bombay—a huge place for research. But it's in the outlying districts, and in the principle of the thing. That's the trouble."

Delphine nodded, watching her cigarette end glow and wane, a tiny point of crimson fire in the moonlight.

"And, supposing we—the English—had a big war? What then? I imagine India would have to take her part in both man-power and finances."

"Possibly the latter; one can't tell. But if it were on a big scale, perhaps both. That is the problem that I have often faced."

"You mean we should be badly off for medical outfit?"

"Very. The cutting-down of expenses should never

have been brought into medical or surgical work. It's the weakest place in the defences anyhow, and it's utterly false economy."

"So I should imagine. Can't you do anything?"

"No more than I have done already. At present, anyhow. But why are we wasting this glorious night talking of my dull shop?"

"Because your dull shop, as you call it, interests me. Interests me specially. Captain Wynnegate —" She paused a moment and threw the end of her cigarette over the edge of the cliff to the rippling water below, "do you remember asking me two months ago—soon after I came to Kala Ismail Khan —what made me understand so well—about your work, I mean?"

A curious shiver ran through him. He dreaded hearing his fears for her knowledge confirmed, yet he could not pretend to have forgotten.

"Yes. Very well," he said. "What of it?"

"I said that I should like one day to ask you a question or two, and you said you would not mind."

"I remember," he said.

"May I ask them now?"

"Please do."

Despite the permission, she remained silent awhile, and gazed out over the dark streak of the river to the moonlit radiance of the sloping hillside on its further bank—a hillside almost white in the brilliant light, fringed on its higher slopes by the wedge of pine forest jutting out on a rocky spur some couple of hundred feet up—pine forest inkily black between the splendour of the moonlit turf and the glittering snow peaks far above.

Now that the moment for speech had come a strange disinclination was borne in upon her; to profane the night's peaceful beauty with matters so drearily

indicative of human folly and selfishness. Then, a slight movement beside her, made her turn to look at her companion, and the expression of eyes and mouth decided her; so clearly did it show her that he both understood and sympathised with what was passing in her mind.

"Don't trouble if you haven't quite made up your mind," he said. "Sometimes it's difficult to know whether one really wants to speak of one's worries or not when the moment comes." She met his steady glance and smiled.

"You are very good to me," she said. "Do you know, I wonder, just how comforting it is to be understood without always having to dot all the i's and cross all the t's in life?"

He made a gesture as if he was going to touch her, but checked it, and leant back against the rock.

"What is the good of friendship without that understanding?" he said. "And I like to think we are friends."

She smiled at him, nodded, moved so that she was half facing him, and began to speak.

"Captain Wynnegate—it's really only one question. What diseases come under the head of hereditary dangers?"

"That's a difficult one to answer," he said. "Opinions are very divided. Even the greatest intellects disagree. Some advanced thinkers maintain that no actual disease is ever handed down—only that the capacity in some cases is greater than in others."

"You mean exactly—?"

"Take a case of tuberculosis. The child of tubercular stock according to these men will be born perfectly sound, but there will be cells in its body predisposed to tubercular disease. It will possess a greater

capacity, in other words, to develop tubercular trouble."

"And the other things?"

"They maintain the same rule."

"Even in—in the worst things? The most deadly scourge of all?"

"Yes."

She was silent a moment, then spoke in a rather low voice.

"Is that also your opinion?"

He too paused before he answered, guessing well enough how she hung on his reply.

"No," he said at last. "It is not."

She moved a trifle restlessly, and he thought she grew paler.

"I thought not."

"Don't forget I am a surgeon, not a pathologist," he said, trying to break the force of the blow he knew such words would administer. "You are asking me pathological questions."

"I know, but I have faith in your knowledge. Captain Wynnegate, you knew my mother. She died insane. When you were attending her, what did you think of her condition?"

"I foresaw its conclusion."

"You sent her to Dr. Charles Salmon, didn't you?"

"I advised her to go. I do not know whether she followed my advice."

"She did. Dr. Salmon saw my father and took charge of her case. She went away into the country, and we seldom saw her. Later she went into a home. We were told it was a nursing home, but it was really for mental cases. She died there after a year. I never saw her after she left the country."

"How do you know all this?" he asked. The subject, recalling his folly and blundering as it did, was

bitter enough to him, but not half so bitter, so he knew, as to the girl beside him.

"My father told me," she said. "He was a strangely unapproachable man. I think he was not happy, and he was very proud; but when it was all over, when she was dead, something of the constraint between us broke down. He gave me greater confidence than—so he said himself—he had ever given anyone, even her. And he told me of those tragic months preceding her death. Of her strange humours, her violent fits of rage, her depression."

"He told you nothing else?" For his life's sake, he could not bear the question.

"About her?"

"About her coming to me?"

"No. He never mentioned your name. You see, you sent her straight on to Dr. Salmon, so I suppose he would not think much about it."

"I see. Go on."

"That is all, except for the one thing of all. Insanity—it is the most dreadful thing of all, and I inherit it, do I not? The capacity or the actual germ. It seems to me to matter very little which. That is true, is it not?"

Her voice was absolutely quiet, but the very quietness told him of the agony of mind beneath the calm exterior hiding the passion and rebellion and dread that must be surging in her heart. Unfittingly enough, there flashed into his mind the memory of Hugh Molyneux on that fatal night ten years ago, and of his iron self-control mastering the rage beneath. The girl before him was his daughter in her command of voice and expression; and he honoured it now as he had honoured it then. He longed to reassure her, and deep in his heart another emotion was gathering; but she would be content with nothing less than the truth,

and he respected her too much to attempt to deceive her.

He began to speak, then stopped abruptly, watching the small white face with its set lips and great dark eyes; he felt he was striking a child, and because of her deep love for him she saw the pain his task gave him, and hastened to lighten it.

"Don't feel you are hurting or frightening me by speaking as you believe," she said gently. "Remember I have lived with the thought of it for nine years and more. I want to be quite sure—that is all. Suspense in such a matter is harder to bear than the truth. You think I may inherit my mother's disease. Is it not so?"

"Yes," he said, and had his life depended on it he could not have added another word.

She made no reply for a moment, but her little square chin went up an inch higher, and the loosely interlocked hands tightened; then she spoke quite quietly.

"Thank you," she said.

The beauty of the moonlit night, the scent and fragrance of the earth and pines, the dazzling glitter of the far-off snow—Wynnegate saw none of them. One fact only stared him in the face, the force of which thrust all other sounds and senses into the background, a force he had never contemplated in connection with the girl before him—a force he had never even troubled to reckon with very seriously—his love for Delphine.

Stunned by the knowledge, he forgot for the moment everything else save its dread significance. Even the blow his words had just dealt her was for the moment blotted out of his mind. All he knew was that he loved her, loved her with a strength and passion all the greater for its late awakening, that he desired

nothing better than the task of guarding and cherishing her for ever.

Her voice normal, even cheerful, broke in upon the storm of emotion that had set his brain swimming and the blood hammering in his pulses.

"Do you know, Captain Wynnegate, I'd quite forgotten the others. Torquil will be expecting me, and Margot will think we've fallen into the river and drowned ourselves. We'd better be going back, hadn't we, if we don't want a search party sent out?"

He rose to his feet, and habit sent his hand out to assist her. As her fingers rested for one instant in his he was suddenly aware, perhaps by reason of the fever in his veins, of the ice-cold touch of her hand. The realisation drove back the fierceness of desire that was the mere fringe as it were of his love, and awoke all his consideration and tenderness. Quickly he picked up the mackintosh and put it round her.

"My dear, you're frozen," he said, unconscious of the significance of his tone. "What have I been thinking of to let you sit there and be chilled? Come, take my arm, and we'll hurry."

She slipped her arm in his, little guessing at the tumult her nearness awoke in him, though piteously conscious of that within herself, and, without another word, they ran up the pine-needled path, only pausing when the shadow of the trees hid any treacherous roots or hollows from their eyes.

Then rather breathlessly Delphine spoke.

"Please don't let us ever speak of all this again," she said. "You have been awfully good in telling me frankly what you think and I shall always appreciate it. And I don't want you to think I am going to brood or worry. In fact, it's almost a relief to know the truth. Anything to me is better than uncertainty."

Now I'm going to put it all out of my mind—at least as far as I can—and I want you to do the same."

He could not quite control the sudden tightening of his arm pressing hers close to his side, but his voice was steady, if a little thick, as he answered her, and then, emerging from the wood into the moonlit meadow, they quickened their pace, and spoke no more till Fred's voice hailed them.

"Hullo you two! We thought you'd been eaten by cannibals. Marguerite wants your opinion about a picnic she's mad on getting up. Wants to know if a twenty-mile ride is too much for you, Delphine?"

Chapter VI

STRANGELY enough, Delphine slept well, and did not awake the next morning till a voice at the doorway broke in upon her dreams, followed by the advent of the speaker and a light kiss on her cheek. Then sleepily opening her eyes, she saw Torquil sitting on the edge of her bed.

"Hullo!" Realisation that she must have overslept widened her eyes, and shaking back her mop of hair, wildly disordered by sleep, she sat up. "What time is it?"

"Half-past eight. How are you? You were sleeping like a baby."

"Flourishing. Splendid. And that's not true about you. Dear old boy, how ill you look! Can't we get some time together to-day for a talk? I'm longing to hear what brought you up here."

"Yes. I want to have a talk with you. Let's go off after breakfast for a long walk. Margot doesn't want you, does she?"

"No. She and Fred are going for a climb, and that means we shan't see them till dinner. I'm awfully glad to see you, Torquil. You were an angel to come." He laughed rather shortly.

"Needs must when the devil drives," he said. "Now I'll go and you can get up. Don't be long."

Bathing and dressing was little more than a half-hour's business, and Wynnegate, who had seen Torquil go to wake her and felt a pang of jealousy in consequence, wandered up and down in the diamond-like clearness of the morning, not more than a hundred

yards from the hut, smoking a cigarette and watching the doorway with one eye.

A slim figure in an iris-blue muslin frock with a broad white collar of embroidered lawn emerged just as his watch pointed to ten minutes after nine, and, seeing him, came straight across the turf with a smile that set his blood on fire.

"Good-morning. Isn't it heavenly out here? I'm dreadfully late and unromantically hungry. There's Margot and breakfast."

"You didn't get a chill after all?" he said, looking down into her dark eyes—eyes merry and clear as if tragedy had never faced them.

"Not a shadow of one! It's only your medical instinct longing to be proved right. Eggs—bacon—trout. Oh, what a joy to feel you could eat the whole world!"

"I said you were a materialist," Fred said, hearing the last words as they strolled up to him. "Personally, I'd call it something stronger. Here's Torquil. Good heavens—" The lazy mockery of his tone faded suddenly. "How ill he looks!"

"Yes, horribly ill." Delphine's anxiety showed in eyes and voice. "I'm afraid there is something wrong, only—don't say anything."

"Of course not—but keep an eye on him, Delphine. You were always good friends, and he'll submit to your management if no one else's."

She nodded, unable to say more as her brother was approaching, and a minute or two later they were all sitting down to breakfast, the table laid in the shade of a big cedar, their carpet close turf starred with all manner of wild flowers so varied and radiant in hue that they looked like jewels set in a world of jade, above them the exquisite azure of the northern sky and all around, hemming in the enchanted land, the ring of snow-capped mountains.

Breakfast was a lively meal, and no one was gayer than Delphine, and, knowing what he knew, Wynnegate felt admiration for her courage added to his wealth of love for her.

Breakfast and the serious details of housekeeping settled with the invaluable Zyarulla, Marguerite and her husband went off for an arduous climb, and Crawford took forcible possession of Wynnegate, who had been waiting about secretly hoping to arrange some expedition with Delphine. Little as he guessed it, Delphine was hoping just as desperately that he would do just that thing, but Crawford being, of course, completely ignorant, seized the opportunity of a morning's uninterrupted companionship with his friend, and was a successful spoke in the wheel.

It was Torquil, therefore, who claimed Delphine's companionship, and presently the two went off across the emerald turf and moss, in the opposite direction to last night.

Half-an-hour's steady ascent, carried out in absolute silence, brought them to an outcrop of granite some hundreds of feet up the hillside, an outcrop stained with brown and yellow lichen, where, by mutual consent, they halted, dropping down comfortably on the warm slab with a fairylike vision of beauty spread out before them. Far away over the eastern mountain wisps of mist were hanging dappling the azure of the heavens with white, giving hint of temporary extinction of sunshine and blue, but rain and storm was far enough away at present, and neither the brother nor sister heeded it.

After a while Torquil spoke.

"Delphine, I've exchanged."

"Exchanged?" Delphine echoed, and sat straight up in amazement. "Torquil! In Heaven's name, why?"

"Heaven hasn't much to do with it," he said shortly. "Rather the other place. I've exchanged into the Indian Army."

"When?"

"Two months ago. I join my regiment at Delhi on the 23rd, so I've just a week up here from to-day before I start. Yes, I'll tell you why. I've been fool enough to forget the pleasant little home-truth that should never be forgotten by either of us"—he glanced at her for an instant—"and fell in love. That rather upset my calculations, so I cleared out."

"But—but—"

"D'you think I could stop meandering about London or Windsor running the chance of seeing her every day?" he said savagely. "There are some things beyond one's powers, and that was beyond mine, so I made up my mind, and here I am. You needn't sympathise. Sympathy is for those who deserve it. I walked into the affair with my eyes open."

"Does that make it any less worthy of sympathy?"

"Makes it rather more damnable. Don't you think so?"

Clenching her hands, Delphine took her underlip between her teeth; her brother's tragedy threatened her self-control as her own did not, and when, a little curious as to her silence, Torquil looked at her with bitter angry eyes beneath their frowning brows, he saw she was fighting desperately for self-command. The sight was unexpected; never in his life had he seen Delphine thus, and the sight broke him down as no words would. With a sudden smothered sound he flung his arm round her, drawing her close, and dropped his head down against her shoulder, hiding eyes and face in her neck.

"Torquil—dear—dear—" Delphine's own arms locked in return and her voice choked. She knew

what such a self-betrayal meant for one who had inherited all his father's colossal pride, and all the tenderness in her gallant young heart welled to the surface. Words were beyond her, but the close embrace, the touch of her trembling lips on his temple and hair conveyed all she could not say, and in those few moments the two, partnered in the same tragic fate, drew closer in spirit than they had ever been.

For a few moments they clung as children might have done, then Torquil drew abruptly back and, springing to his feet, walked away to the edge of the rocky plateau, where he stood back to her blowing his nose vigorously, and Delphine, her own hand-kerchief crumpled into a wet little ball, dried her eyes as best she could.

When he came back to her a few moments later, he was ashamed and prepared to be furiously angry, as much, perhaps, with her as with himself, for his breakdown, but, meeting her eyes, his anger faded, for her irrepressible sense of humour had brought a quivering smile to eyes and lips.

"Torquil dear—it's rather funny, isn't it? The two of us—just howling over the same thing—because I happen to have done the same."

"You!" Forgetful of himself, he stared at her, and she nodded.

"Yes, me. Human nature's very much the same in either sex, I expect. I only told you because you'd understand then how I can feel about *you*. Don't let's talk about it. I don't want—I can't—answer any questions."

He sat down again on the rock beside her and, putting out his hand, gripped hers.

"Delphine—dearest little girl, I'm damned sorry."

She nodded, and silence fell between them, both

respecting the other's reticence, and presently, tacitly agreeing, they set forth on their return walk.

The next few days the little camp about Cedar Cottage was too congested for many *tête-à-têtes*, and Wynnegate, keenly as he longed for Delphine's companionship, was thankful for the circumstances that prevented him getting the very thing he needed. The scientist in him fighting the lover, he was relieved when the attempts passion made were thwarted by Crawford or Desmond claiming Delphine's society, and Delphine herself, not guessing how it was with him, was devoting herself to Torquil, eagerly feeding the friendship that had sprung up so warmly between them. The weather breaking for thirty-six hours brought drenching rains and winds that roared in the pine trees, and mackintoshes covered the beds, and meals on the verandah were joys of the past. Then one morning everyone awoke to a new world, a world rain-washed and radiant, every leaf and twig sparkling, and the distances deep-toned with soft purples and madders.

Marguerite was arranging for a day's ride to the encampment of some friends, and in consultation with Zyarulla was arranging details of the commissariat, when her husband entered the room and spoke her name.

“ Margot, can you spare me a moment or two ?”

His tone made her look up sharply from the pencilled list she held in her hand, and at the sight of his grave face she dismissed the khitmutgar and, coming across to her husband, laid her hand on his arm.

“ Dearest—what has happened ?”

For answer he handed her an open telegram, and, glancing at it, she read the fatal message sent from Kala Ismail Khan.

“ ‘ Cholera broken out. All leave stopped.’ Craw-

ford and Wynnegate have been wired, of course. I'm afraid it's a serious affair, for I've heard from Whately at Murree that he's summoned too. It means a break-up at once, dear. Can you come and help me right away?"

"Of course. But give me five minutes just to warn Zyarulla to begin the packing. Luckily, he's a treasure of competence."

Before he could answer, Delphine burst into the room and, seeing them both, caught Fred's arm.

"Fred—I've just heard from Major Crawford. I'm coming down with you two. I just wanted to tell you, because, of course, Margot is coming."

She glanced at Margot, who smiled and nodded approval, but Fred's glance was sharp.

"Margot and you coming? Don't talk nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense at all," his wife answered, "and Delphine shall come if she chooses."

She had discussed this probability long ago with her niece, and, as her sympathy was always on the side of courage and endurance, she had agreed to support her should a struggle of wills arise. But Fred, too, was no weakling, and Margot foresaw a pitched battle; signing to Delphine to leave them, she turned to her husband.

"Darling, do you imagine I could bear to stay up here while you were in that danger alone? Fred, don't even think of such things. It would kill me."

"Margot, you don't know what you're saying. You don't know what cholera means in a place like that."

"I was through the outbreak in Assan Kandi five years ago."

"That was different. It was the end of the hot weather, there was an adequate medical staff, a good hospital——"

"You and I were not different. It's no good, dearest. I must come—and Delphine shall, too. She's plenty of grit and she can be useful. Yes—I know what you're going to say, but wait. Delphine isn't like the normal young girl. She hasn't the same future. I hate to put it into words—you can understand without, can't you, Fred?"

He gave way finally, holding her close in his arms.

"Bless you for the bravest and dearest wife that ever lived," he said. "I'm doing wrong to let you come, and I know it, but God knows I want you. Can you be ready to start this afternoon?"

"Of course I can. Ah, Fred, you don't know how grateful I am. Kiss me now, dear, and let me go. I've the work of ten people to do."

In her bedroom, door and window flung wide, Delphine packed at top speed, wildly glad, despite the danger and horror that awaited her, that she was not to be left behind while those she loved went into the burden and heat of the day. And all the sunny morning the glade resounded to the sounds of breaking camp—chattering servants, barking dogs, falling tent-poles, and the racket and banging of hastily packed furniture; while Wynnegate, after a vain and furious argument with both Delphine and Fred, devoted himself to superintending the sewing up of superfluous saddles and the safe storing of things unwanted in Srinagar for the coming months.

Chapter VII

THE journey from Kashmir to the plains was a new experience for Delphine, and one that she never forgot. The cedar-shaded Himalayas and the furnace of the Punjab are as wide apart as the Poles, and a hurried rush from the former to the latter is a very fair purgatory, even for the hardened traveller. When distress of mind is added to physical discomfort of the most acute kind the hours are a torment, and so every member of the little party found them. Wynnegate was perhaps the greatest sufferer: in addition to his anxiety about the extent of the outbreak was his agony of mind—it was no less—about Delphine. That she should be running into danger, into the horrors of cholera, added to the worst of the heat, was hideous, and his own distress at the discovery of his love for her was acute, when that love was powerless to protect her at a time like this. The first seventy miles Marguerite and Delphine were carried down in doolies, greatly against their will; but Howard was adamant for once, refusing to allow them to ride through the unceasing downpour.

The train was not much better, but very different, and finally, when they entered into Lahore station about three o'clock in the morning, the place was a veritable inferno.

Delphine was interested, in spite of all discomfort, in the crowded platforms and terrific racket of human and vehicular traffic, so varied was the scene and so different the types before her.

Hindu merchants and Pathan troopers, Englishmen with dogs, women with babies, sturdy country fellows

of the farmer class, everybody with bundles, everybody jostling and shouting—it was a revelation to the girl whose interest in life was so eager. As she stood by the carriage window, Wynnegate pushing through the throng on his way back from the telegraph office caught sight of her. A smile lighting his grave eyes, he came to the window.

"This is against all laws and all sense," he said, meeting her glance. "I did my utmost to make Howard keep you both away."

Delphine nodded, smiling a little.

"I know. I heard you. But Margot has a perfect right to be with her husband if she wishes. And I—"

She broke off suddenly as he echoed her words, and the rare colour rushed upward under her skin, flooding cheek and brow and throat with rose. For a second utterly taken aback, Wynnegate stared, then he turned his eyes away, guessing amazedly at part of the truth. She was coming down because there was someone she wished to be near, even at the risk of her own life. A storm of jealousy shook him; his face went white under its tan, his hands clenched on the door till the knuckles were white as ivory and the veins stood out in great cords; regardless of what she must think he stood rigidly still, hearing and seeing nothing of the roaring crowd around him till Delphine's voice came clearly to his ears.

"Captain Wynnegate, why are you so angry? Aren't you glad I shall be in Kala Ismail Khan?"

There was a wistfulness in her voice like that of an anxious child, and with a great effort he looked up at her.

"Can you expect me to be glad that you are risking your life?" he said.

At the rough tone the distress went suddenly out of her face, even as her good resolutions went to the winds. All she wanted was to hear him say he was glad of her company, was to receive one word that should tell her he was not indifferent. Leaning down a little so that her arms rested on the ledge of the window her glance challenged his.

"I didn't ask you that. I asked you if you were glad I should be in Kala Ismail Khan with you all."

The blood hammered in his ears and temples; one instant he met her eyes, then over his set face swept a look she had never seen before, a look that almost frightened her by its intensity of passion, and his lips opened for the rush of words that fought for utterance—words drowned in the raucous shriek of the engine and Fred's voice near them.

"Get in, Wynnegate. We're just off."

In a dry red-hot morning they reached the border of that country where the monsoon is non-existent, a desolate land tortured under heavens of brass, and their railway journey was ended for the time being, tongas being the next stage of their journey.

Already it seemed to them all that the drenched moss and ferns, the cedar-shaded meadows and cool streams of the Himalayas belonged to another world half a hundred years away, and even Delphine's spirits began to flag, though she allowed no one to guess it. Here, too, as they travelled, evidence of the scourge's effects began to show in the number of men recalled from leave and travelling to their various posts. Train again came with the evening, and not till another day had risen over the tortured land did they reach the last stage of their journey—the Indus, a flood four miles in width.

Ferries took them over, and about six o'clock that evening the clattering tongas entered Kala Ismail

Khan, two of them turning in at the gateway of the Howards' yellow bungalow; and there on the verandah Colonel Houghton awaited them, knowing that Howard's hospitality would not allow Wynnegate or Crawford to go on to their own empty home.

A spare small man, with a network of fine lines about keen grey eyes and a tough and wiry frame, he glanced sharply from Marguerite to Delphine as he handed them down.

"Mrs. Howard, this is very wrong of you," he said, eyes and tone belying his words. "But Miss Molyneux——"

"I would come," Delphine answered, meeting his frown of dismay. "Neither my aunt nor uncle could stop me. And I can be useful, Colonel Houghton. I have seen a good deal of illness and suffering in my time."

He grunted unintelligibly, and turned to Wynnegate as they all entered Marguerite's drawing-room, which was shady and absolutely cool after the furnace glare of the outer world.

"Your work is cut out for you," he said. "No case actually in camp yet—of course we've gone under canvas—but in the town there are a good many cases and several deaths already. Fever's got our men at present, and of course—among some of them—funk."

"And the Canal Works Camp?" Wynnegate put the question anxiously; more than anyone else did he guess what hung on the answer.

Houghton's wrinkled face hardened. He and Wynnegate were alone for the moment. Isolated in the big room where all the rest were drawing round Marguerite's tea-table for tea, sandwiches and "pegs," and he could speak freely.

"Damned bad," he said. "I saw Ratcliffe three

days ago." Ratcliffe was the engineer in charge. "And he'd had two hundred deaths in the week."

"Two hundred!" Wynnegate raised his eyebrows and checked a low whistle of consternation. "You're right. It is damned bad."

Crawford was standing by Delphine's chair, a large tumbler of iced whisky and soda in his hand, and just as he lifted it to his lips he glanced across at them and, catching the expression on his friend's face, he made some excuse to Delphine and joined them.

"What's up? Bad news?"

Houghton, relieved by the arrival of the only two men he trusted as he trusted himself, nodded and repeated what he had just told Wynnegate, and for a few minutes they stood talking together, and then together went out with a hasty word of farewell to their hostess. Delphine, aching with fatigue from the wearisome journey, nevertheless did not go at once to bed, for one or two other men came in and she stayed to help entertain them, knowing Marguerite was every whit as tired as herself.

Then, too, despite the aching of muscles and nerves, a little secret joy sustained her, for Wynnegate had looked across the room and had given her a glance and a smile, although he had no time to bid a verbal farewell.

Not till she was alone in her room did she begin to realise dimly what the heat was going to be. Doors and windows were closed, but even so a dry furnace blast seemed to penetrate rooms and darkness brought no relief; Delphine lay and gasped and slept fitfully through the hours, and towards morning, a morning dull and red-hot, gave up the attempt at sleep altogether and began to think, arms clasped behind her head. That look of Wynnegate's when he had stood

beside her carriage at Lahore station had revealed to her the perilous situation; but because beneath the gallant boyish exterior she was real woman she dwelt on the joy before the danger. If Wynnegate did not actually love her yet, he certainly cared more for her than for any other person, and the remainder rested with herself. Despite only three months of acquaintance she knew quite enough of him to welcome such happiness with the utmost joy and gratitude. He was a man to be trusted, and her experience of life had taught her that such was a rare quality, and she loved him with all her heart. It was useless to hide the truth from herself, and she did not attempt to. Yet—now she faced the other side. What was the good of it all? Cursed by the hereditary taint in her blood, what possible shadow of right had she to allow any man to care for her, or she herself to marry any man? Even if he should care enough for her to be content without children, there was still his own side of the bargain. She had no right, none whatever, knowing what she did, to condemn any man to suffer what her father had suffered. Inclination whispered that she was probably frightening herself in vain; that most likely, being of a very different temperament to her unhappy mother, the evil in her would never arise from its dormant state; that it might die out altogether. If Wynnegate chose to take the risk with his eyes open, surely he was entitled to do so? She could not but admit that this last had reason in it; if love were the only thing. But was love the only thing? She had always believed it was—and she believed so now—but real love sometimes meant self-sacrifice, always meant consideration of the lover's happiness before one's own. Delphine had boasted often of her capability to face facts. She faced them now in the red-hot Indian dawn, with set lips and hollow eyes,

fought her fight and came out the conqueror—at the price of something of her eager youth.

Meanwhile, in his bungalow, Wynnegate had tumbled into bed about midnight, after writing a couple of urgent letters to headquarters asking for an assistant and for more supplies both of drugs and equipment, but at four o'clock Zyarulla came to him and shook him gently.

“ Sahib, sahib, wake——”

Struggling from the chains of heavy sleep, he roused himself to see his servant bending over the bed and to hear the low insistent call.

“ Hullo—what is it ?” he muttered blinking stupidly. “ What’s happened ?”

“ Sahib, they have sent for you. Ruthven Sahib is sick.”

“ Ruthven Sahib ? My God !” The mists of sleep were startled away even as the horrified words left his lips, and he sprang up issuing brief orders which Zyarulla carried out with the prompt unquestioning obedience of his kind, crowning all by bringing his master a cup of hot tea with an egg beaten up in it, which he insisted on his drinking before he left the bungalow. Ten minutes later Wynnegate was at Ruthven’s bungalow, and found his patient seized with that desperate severity with which cholera seems to attack the strong. Ruthven himself, dour Scotsman that he was, took his punishing in silence, fighting for his life through the breathless hours with a grim tenacity that awoke all Wynnegate’s admiration.

Over the eastern plains the sun rose, a white-hot radiance to torment the gasping land, and when Wynnegate left the bedside for a hurried bath and a snatched breakfast, it was seven o’clock.

Ill news travels fast; he was swallowing down

leathery toast and tea when Colonel Houghton entered horror-stricken at what he had heard.

He judged the condition of the patient by the look on Wynnegate's face even before he put the customary questions:

“How is he?”

The other shrugged his shoulders.

“About as bad as he can be,” he said. “But he's making a good fight for it, and I've hopes I'll pull him through. Any fresh cases?”

“Two in camp, and Howard reports twenty more and fifteen deaths in the city. Well, I only looked in to hear, and I must be off. We shall have to work the men like machines if we want to keep 'em fit. See you later.”

He nodded and swung off with a clink of spurs, and Wynnegate, after giving precise directions to Ruthven's servant, swung himself into the saddle and cantered off to the camp. There he found the two men in the big tent that would do duty as a hospital for the moment for the isolation camp, one only slightly ill, the other desperately so, his condition complicated by almost insane terror.

There was little to be done—the orderlies had their instructions. Wynnegate had to inspect a battalion, as well as the arrangements for the camp, then had to ride back to the cantonment where Crawford just off to parade met him with the news that Wilde was down, and after seeing him he hurried to Ruthven. There he found small change, and was off to attend a medical parade, and from thence to the whitewashed hospital.

As Colonel Houghton said, the men must be worked like machines. There was a desperate amount to be done, for on the Frontier when cholera strikes, work, always heavy, is doubled both for officers and civilians.

Howard, with a young civil assistant, worked at highest pressure, waging the eternal war against "filth, flies, and funk," as he described it to Delphine, going into every kind of danger, seeing revolting sights, never sparing himself in the pursuit of his duty, in the way so characteristic of his race and type.

Two days after the commencement of his attack Wilde died, the first white man to be a victim, and was buried that same evening in the little desolate cemetery.

Delphine heard the far-off sound of the "Last Post," so indescribably full of dignified pathos, and clenched her hands to drive back sudden tears, and Marguerite, who was busily nursing a young subaltern friend of Desmond's named Cartwright, who had had a sharp attack of fever, came into the room just as the distant sound died away. She was quite wise enough not to notice her niece's quickly controlled emotion, and instead dropped down into a low chair and began to discuss some domestic details.

"Delphine, we must start some regular entertaining!" she began, and Delphine stared.

"Entertaining? Now?"

"Yes. Now. Even more than ever. You see, dear, it's like this. The men are all working harder than usual, but cholera is a curious thing. The most dangerous risk of all is that of fright. Captain Wynnegate will tell you that there are cases—and many—brought on by sheer funk. Now in their leisure hours we *must* provide something. I've arranged that every afternoon there'll be tea here, and music, and I shall try and get hold of as many as I can. You'll sing, won't you?"

"Night and day if you want me to."

"Good. Your singing will be the great attraction. Luckily we've got a billiard table, and if they want cards they can have them."

" And the men ?"

" Our own—yes—you mean the white troops ?"

" Yes. As you say they like my singing, let me sing to them twice a week. We might fix up a regular concert if Colonel Houghton will let us."

" I had thought of something of that kind. You know Major Crawford sings well, and he would help. And if it's not too hot, we might think of sports. I'll discuss that, though, with the Colonel and Captain Wynnegate. For the present all I wanted was your assistance for my afternoons."

" You needn't even have asked !" Delphine retorted. " D'you know, Margot, you look very tired. Let me go and sit with Mr. Cartwright for a bit, and you lie down. You're precious, you know."

Marguerite laughed, but allowed herself to be persuaded and went off to rest for an hour, while Delphine devoted herself to the invalid, with results fatal—for the time being—to his heart and head.

After dinner that night Desmond looked in to say Ruthven was a good deal better, and that his own men had been ordered into camp. News that whitened his mother's lips, though she gave no other sign of the pang of anxiety his news gave her.

Like all other Indian outposts, the difficulty at Kala Ismail Khan was caused largely by the native attitude to disease and death, the fatalism that combats the most heroic efforts on the part of the white men, and now those officers and civilians renewed their knowledge.

Howard's work was even more deadly and difficult than Houghton's and Wynnegate's, for in the runways of the native city and the crowded bazaar, he had to do, not with a body of men who were after all disciplined, even if ignorant, but with a swarming horde of obstinate frightened creatures, tenacious of caste, enemies of proper feeding and the barest rudiments of cleanliness;

there, almost single-handed, he fought a desperate fight, isolating himself so far as was possible from his home, working early and late and sparing himself not at all. In these days Marguerite grew worn and haggard, facing always the dread double anxiety about husband and son, and Fred himself went through the hours with the indifference wiped out of his manner, the mask of foppishness which he always wore, dropped, and his heavy lazy lids showing more clearly the eyes beneath them that were never lazy or indifferent at all.

During these first few weeks Delphine hardly saw Wynnegate, and then only for a passing moment when he dropped in to the yellow bungalow at tea-time, and in the presence of many others. For Marguerite's standing invitation to all and sundry had been most cordially appreciated, and her big green drawing-room, comparatively cool always after the hell of the outer world, was always crowded. Tea, iced coffee, pegs, and the cakes and sandwiches which Marguerite and Zyarulla seemed to conjure out of most unpromising material, received the heartiest appreciation. There was always music, generally fresh magazines sent out regularly to Delphine from home, and plenty of talk and laughter.

It was not easy to carry on cheerily in the face of death and danger, when the thermometer stood persistently at 100° , dropping two or three degrees only when the sun sank, but the Frontier trains gallant men and women and no one grumbled—openly at least.

In the red-hot circle of days, parades, gun practices, sick parades, and hospital inspection followed one another in terrible monotony; polo became a fierce effort to be made for the sake of example, and the only breaks were the afternoons at the yellow bungalow, where Marguerite and Delphine welcomed and entertained all who came with unvarying pleasure.

A temporary cholera hospital had been erected on the southern outskirts of the native city, a handful of rough tents and rougher huts, and the last inmate from the immediate circle at the station itself was Dad Ali Khan, Marguerite's devoted gardener, wailing lamentations as to the fate of his sixteen-year-old wife and two fat brown babies.

Marguerite, waiting for him to be fetched, soothed his fears as he lay coiled up on a mat in the shade of the verandah, by promising to take all three under her personal charge, was rewarded by a glance of anguished gratitude, a few stammered words, and a kiss on the hem of her white dress.

Six hours later Dad Ali Khan once more emerged from the cholera huts to be hastily conveyed to the Mahomedan burial ground half a mile away, and Delphine, a slender white figure in the hot dusk of the hut in the compound, tried to comfort the wailing child who had called him husband.

The next domestic tragedy was that the elder baby, aged three, poisoned himself by stealing some salts of lemon with which Pundita had been cleaning a white hat of her mistress's, and Delphine knowing that the chances for his life were a hundred to one against, took upon herself to nurse the small creature, and in a few days had him running about again. This won her a doglike devotion from the poor little mother and a popularity that spread even beyond the compound, and she felt as she went her way through the fierce red-hot hours that her return from Kashmir had not been in vain.

Torquil had gone to Delhi, and from there sent anxious notes as to her welfare, sometimes necessitating telegraphic replies, but Delphine's whole attention was given up to the present, and she thought very little about either past or future. Day by day the ranks of the regiment in camp thinned, day by day the news

from the native city grew worse, and the account of matters at the Canal Works was appalling. Delphine wondered sometimes if the solution to her troubles and private tragedy lay here, ready to hand under the brazen sky, and grew curiously apathetic. If it were so—what matter?

Yet some instinct of level-headedness and scorn of weak sentimentality kept her from dwelling on the possibility. So long as she could help, what right had she to grumble?

One afternoon, when Margot, a victim to a bad neuralgic headache, was resting, preparatory to resuming her duties as hostess at four o'clock, Delphine sat down to write a long-delayed letter to her father, and was barely half through it when Wynnegate was announced. His appearance was so rare in these days, that she allowed her glad welcome to be seen and, jumping up with alacrity, came across the room to meet him.

"Captain Wynnegate, what a stranger you are, and how good to see you!"

The tone was even more eager than the words, and Wynnegate's tired eyes lit up; he had been too desperately at work to have had any time for introspection, and all he troubled about just now was her health.

"How are you?" he said, keeping her hand in his a good deal longer than was strictly necessary, and scanning her face closely. "Feeling fit?"

"Quite. Limp, of course, but quite well."

"You're thinner," he said, the doctor for the moment uppermost, "and the shadows under your eyes don't please me. Still, I expect it's useless to think you can go through this sort of thing and not show it in some way or another. How is your patient?"

"The baba? Flourishing! He has an almost inconvenient affection for me now, and clings to my legs whenever he sees me. I'm rather proud of my efforts."

" You have reason to be," he said, and then was silent awhile, quite content to lie back in a lounge chair, resting mind and body in the quiet and comparative coolness after the glare without.

Zyarulla brought in glasses, ice, and syphons, and talk of a desultory kind broke the silence; Delphine was too content to be eager for much conversation, and as for Wynnegate, it was enough that he sat in this restful room, at ease after hours in the saddle, refreshed by the cool iced drink and, above all, watching Delphine.

She was certainly very pale, her cheeks were hollow, her eyes darkly shadowed, but she looked bright and deliciously cool in her white frock; and she was clearly pleased to see him. After a while he began to realise that this idle gazing had its dangers, and putting his empty glass down, he pulled himself together and sat up, determined to remember things he found were only too easy to forget.

Delphine herself, unwittingly, helped him.

" Fred was saying the other day that you had asked for an assistant," she said. " D'you think you'll get him ?"

" Not for a moment. As you once aptly remarked, the official mind is adamantine. I am convinced the Treasury—Ewartson—will consider my demand exorbitantly extravagant."

" I'm afraid you're right. But tell me, if there is this difficulty to get adequate help in peace-time, when cholera is more or less endemic, what happens in war ?"

" We muddle on as best we can," he said. " We can just manage not to disgrace ourselves too deeply. And it isn't in medical staff only—in guns it's the same. Our chief difficulty is for pathological work—the surgical side is simpler."

" I suppose, because given certain instruments, ether, and a reasonable amount of antiseptics you're all right."

"That's it. Disease is a worse thing to tackle. Of course, I'm only speaking of the little brushes we've had lately. If we had a really big war I don't know what would happen."

"And if England was drawn into war with Germany ? That's the usual idea, isn't it ? I suppose India would have to take an active share in the proceedings."

"Probably."

"And she'd have to—or she would—supply equipment for her men ? Well, in that case, how would things go from a medical standpoint ?"

"Damned badly. I beg your pardon."

"You mean India couldn't manage it ?"

"Not adequately. She'd send magnificent fighters, but her practical outfit for them—hospital stores and that kind of thing—would be utterly inefficient. That is, if they keep on their present policy."

"D'you think it will come ?"

"What, war with Germany ? Undoubtedly, and pretty soon—in the next ten years. I am certain of it."

"We should deserve it," she said rather sadly. "I don't admire us as a nation—except here. And here it's the rank and file that do so splendidly, men like Fred and Colonel Houghton and Mr. Harris"—Harris was Fred's assistant—"it's not the high-up officials. This matter interests me so enormously, Captain Wynnegate, because I've heard my uncle discussing this very thing."

"Indeed ? Is it indiscreet to ask more ?"

"No. And if it were, I would tell you. My aunt was indisposed one day and Uncle Bruce had an important luncheon party. Quite a small one. It will interest you to know that the guests consisted of Sir William Ewartson, General Hitch, and Mr. Bristowe."

"You mean Angus Bristowe, the late minister ?"

"Yes. He has been visiting India for a three months' holiday, as you probably know."

"I know. Go on."

"I played hostess for Aunt Cynthia, and as I had met Mr. Bristowe several times at home—he is a political friend of my father's—and as I played my rôle with great tact, presently Mr. Bristowe began to talk. He talks excellently. They had met to discuss some contemplated political measure. They talked, led by him, of half a hundred other things till suddenly he spoke of Lord Horton's disbanding of certain regular regiments—my uncle hastened to condemn the move. Mr. Bristowe declared it most wise. The men were only drafted into other regiments, he said, made into more effective fighting units; he was opposed to militarism. Finance was our safeguard. Sir William Ewartson put in there. He was on his own ground. According to him, the financiers would never permit war. They stood together strongly, and they controlled the essential sinews. War would be a senseless destruction of their work and their fortunes. They would never allow it, and without their consent it was impossible."

"And General Molyneux? What was his view?"

"He disagreed. My uncle is an ambitious man, and he is young enough not to be quite dehumanised by honours and position. He argued with Mr. Bristowe and Sir William that sheer force might prove stronger even than money. Mr. Bristowe brought up the argument in return that even if finance wobbled in its opinions—the verb is mine—the Socialists would stand together, the great labouring classes would never consent to fight, when fighting meant that on them would fall the brunt of the burden."

"Bristowe has always inclined to the Brotherhood of the great Unwashed," Wynnegate said. "I am not surprised."

"General Hitch objected to that. Discipline of centuries would still hold, so he declared, if authority

commanded. Isolated leaders might endeavour to resist. They would be crushed in the general consensus of public opinion."

"Did he refer actually to Germany?"

"Not directly. Sir William Ewartson has German blood—and his grandfather's name was Meyerstein—but he said that he believed that if Socialism held in England and perhaps in France, it would never hold, when it came to the pinch, in the other great Powers. Their discipline was too strong, and they had learnt the habit of obedience. Socialist spoutings were spoutings only. Sir William said little on that point. His interests were all in the financial side of the argument."

"It was an interesting luncheon."

"Most. Uncle Bruce hates a crowd of servants then, so they talked freely! They felt I was too insignificant to trouble about, I think."

"Did Sir William touch on retrenchment out here?"

"Once. He said his policy would spread the education of the masses and save the Home Government well over a million a year sterling."

Wynnegate's tired face grew grim.

"I wish I had him here now," he said. "And, even so, this is only the normal thing we expect most years if the weather is hotter than usual. It's the shortsightedness of these men that is so deplorable. Why don't they prepare for a great struggle? Then it might be averted. Germany is preparing, and has prepared for years. France is sold by her Government—she possesses the most magnificent people and the most corrupt politicians in the world. We shut our eyes to everything that is disagreeable and hope for the best."

"To be absolutely ready for war—if your neighbour has become so already—is the best way to ensure peace, in my opinion. That's a damnable platitude,

and you must forgive me for it, but I'm sure it's truth. To train a great nation for war, to educate them from their babyhood to be military, is to beget a veritable Frankenstein—and if that nation finds a neighbour unprepared yet possessing many of the things it itself wants—well Frankenstein will either rend that nation or else its creator. The creator will naturally prefer the former alternative. Do you agree?"

"Only too thoroughly," she said. "Mr. Bristowe's love for Germany has been known—and for a very long while. Both he and Lord Horton have advertised it as the home of their souls. I wish they'd keep their bodies in the same place."

Wynnegate laughed.

"So do a good many people," he said. "I wish I had been in your shoes at that luncheon. It was epoch-making."

"It was—of a kind. Do have some tea now you are rested and cooler. You look so fagged."

"Thanks, I'd like some. I'm quite all right."

"I wasn't suggesting otherwise, but you are very tired, I know. Just sit comfily back where you are, and let me talk to you."

The words and tone were light, but Wynnegate took them with sudden seriousness.

"God knows I'd ask nothing better," he said, then bit his lip, for the words had come involuntarily.

"I'm getting lazy in my old age," he said with a laugh, trying to pass off that sudden glimpse of his heart.

A faint colour stained Delphine's pallor, but she took his cue easily enough.

"I have not observed the signs," she said. "And you deserve some rest. Even Margot, who was indefatigable, takes a certain 'time off.'"

"And you?"

"Oh, yes, when I want it," she said evasively.

"Don't forget this is only a passing thing for me, so I need not take such care of myself. It's different with all of you who are living here. When I go home I can rest."

A sudden pang went through him.

"You are not going home yet, are you? I had not realised you——"

She interrupted him with an odd little smile.

"No. Not yet. At least I hope not. I think I shall stay out till nearly Christmas. Of course, it depends a little on my father."

"You don't think of—of staying out altogether?"

"How d'you mean?"

"Of—marrying anyone whose work lies here." He did not know what prompted his question; it was certainly in the worst possible taste. That he admitted, yet he had asked it, and when the words had passed his lips he saw Delphine's pallor grow ashen, saw lines he had never seen before about the mouth and eyes, and obstinately refused to regret his lapse. For a full moment she faced him, looking steadily into his eyes. Then, in a voice he had never heard from her before, so cold was it, with such quiet contempt in its tone, she spoke.

"You should be able to reply to that question yourself, Captain Wynnegate," she said. "Does it not strike you that it was rather an impertinent one?"

He had his answer, and it was like a smack in the face—and well deserved, as he knew. In the tense silence that followed he saw her lips quiver, and the sight nearly broke down all the resolutions he had formed. He clenched his hands on his chair to keep himself from taking her into his arms, and not till he could trust his voice did he speak. Then the fierce impulse of passion mastered, he rose to his feet and went across to her.

"Will you forgive me?" he said simply. "The question was, as you say, impertinent, and I beg your pardon for it very sincerely. May we wipe it right off the slate? Will you forget as well as forgive that I ever said such a thing?"

"It was not like you," she said, and there was distress in eyes and voice. "I can't bear to think of your being—being—like all other people. I think of you differently, somehow." In her perplexity as to what had prompted his words, she was making things harder than she knew for him, and realising this, he desired to go as soon as might be. Yet he could not depart until matters were right between them.

"Will you forgive me?" he repeated again. "Will you forget? I can only say, very humbly, that I am sorry."

She stood for a moment looking up at him, then nodded.

"Yes," she said, "our friendship is too real, I hope, to be upset by a few careless words. Oh"—seeing the look in his eyes—"I am ungenerous. It is for you to forgive me now. Yes, we'll wipe it right out. What, are you off?"

"Yes. Hospital rounds and then on to North camp. Major Crawford's Sikhs have just marched off into camp. There were two cases this morning, so I must go."

"You'll take care of yourself?"

"Any amount," he said lightly. "And, as for you, don't try to do too much, and rest all the middle of the day. Good-bye—Delphine."

He used her name for the first time, and though she flushed, it was from pleasure, not embarrassment.

"Good-bye, and good luck to your sick, Gervase," she said as deliberately; then smiled.

"That puts matters very right, doesn't it?" she

said, and returning his close handshake watched him mount and ride away through the glare.

In the compound all was still enough beneath a brazen sky, and the earth, scarcely less brazen, seemed deadened into immobility. Just across the road, where it was crossed by another at right angles, was a grove of banana trees, and there a bullock stood in placid patience, flicking a lazy tail when the flies became too annoying, and beside him his owner lay in the scanty shade, pausing a little to take his noonday rest. Over the roof of a bungalow near by some squirrels played, chattering, and in the distance the sound of Wynnegate's horse grew rapidly fainter. When all echo of the hoof-beats had vanished, Delphine, gasping in the heat, re-entered the bungalow, closing the door carefully behind her.

Chapter VIII

FRED HOWARD was riding homeward a few hours later from his visit to a neighbouring village, where he had been settling a long-standing dispute between two farmers, had held a court of justice in a hut roofed with corrugated iron for three hours, had inspected the villagers' huts, and given strict orders with regard to waste matter and garbage heaps, had granted an advance applied for by a peasant for more seed, and had endeavoured to make the villagers understand that cleanliness and hard work were the greatest safeguards against the dreaded scourge. Consequently he was "weary with well-doing" and could only hope the seed he had sown had fallen on good ground.

He had still a three-mile ride to the station, and, having had a scanty meal, he turned aside to a tiny village just off his road, where a peasant farmer, a Sikh discharged by lameness from the army, he knew had his home, and was made welcome by him in a manner that gave clear enough evidence of his popularity in his district.

Howard dismounted, tied his horse up in the shade of a mulberry tree whose leaves were scorched and withered with heat, and saw the peasant's small son stagger to him with a pail of water, then turned to his host and accepted gratefully the welcome gift he brought. Ram Singh, lightly attired for labour, had been just off to his fields, but Howard's visit was opportune, for he had something on his mind, and now was the chance to say it.

He came out from his house bearing a wooden bowl filled with cow's milk, and a smaller vessel containing sugar. With a polite wish for his sahib's health he

put in the sugar, stirring it with his fingers in the friendly manner which was his custom. This relaxation of caste in the matter of sweetmeats compounded of sugar and ghi, was one of the things that had often puzzled Howard when he first came to India many years ago; now he was used to it, and took the bowl with gratitude, drinking thirstily of the sweetened milk impregnated with wood smoke, which latter is used for purifying all vessels used for milk.

When the welcome draught was finished, Ram Singh took the bowl away, then came again and, sitting down in the scanty shade, made polite conversation for a while until Howard, who knew his man fairly well, brought him tactfully to the point.

"I think that you desire to speak to me of other things than cattle and harvest, Ram Singh," he said after a while. "Is it not so?"

The man's dark eyes flashed a quick look up at the face of the Englishman, then veiled themselves.

"The sahib has much wisdom," he murmured, and was silent awhile; a silence Howard knew better than to break. Ram Singh would take his own time.

After a short while, the Sikh looked up again.

"The sahib is my father and my mother," he said. "What am I that I should trouble him with my affairs and my dreams—and yet—and yet—it cometh to my mind that the sahib should know these things."

The time had come. Howard lit the cigarette he had been holding.

"Speak on," he said. "I am here to listen, and your words are safe with me."

"That I know, sahib," was the quick reply, "and indeed the matter seemeth one of urgency. Does the sahib call to mind the raid that those misbegotten sons of the evil one carried out on the station some few months ago before the great heat came upon the land?"

“ I remember.”

“ Sahib, it was no ordinary affair of robbery. It was a plot.”

Such frank speaking was uncommon enough to make Howard start, but he hid his astonishment very well and looked reflectively at the glowing end of his cigarette as he spoke.

“ Those are strange words, Ram Singh. What mean they ?”

“ Sahib, I speak that I do know. It was an attempt on the part of those sons of Belial to steal rifles—but the rifles were but the cloak wherewith to hide their full iniquity. That night Wynnegate Sahib had been to the hospital and would have returned after night-fall, but by the mercy of God he came early and went into the mess. The robbers desire to capture him, sahib.”

“ To capture him ?” Even then Howard did not raise his voice and, by his nonchalant manner, might have been discussing the price of cattle, or the delay of the longed-for rain.

“ Even so, sahib. They have the great sickness, and they desire Wynnegate Sahib badahur to live in their country and to cure them. They have heard from the travellers how he did even so, many winters ago.”

Howard nodded. The possibility of such a thing was most likely, and he could trust Ram Singh as he could trust few people.

“ You think they will try again ?”

“ I am sure of it, heaven-born.”

“ H’m ! Shall I tell Wynnegate Sahib where I have learned this story ?”

He gave the man a quick glance as he spoke and Ram Singh met it steadily.

“ Even as my sahib thinks fit. My word—the word

of a poor farmer would carry little weight with the sahib, yet if it be of any avail let the heaven-born do so. It might be that Wynnegate Sahib would hearken. And if the heaven-born will not remit a portion of the tax on the cotton-fields then I—even I—shall be forced to beg my bread and to see my children starve! If the heaven-born will only listen, for I am a poor man and the heaven-born is mighty!"

The whine ended in a low salaam, and out of the corner of his eye Howard saw a fat priest wandering near, ostentatiously murmuring prayers and watching them both out of his narrow little eyes. With an impatient gesture Howard rose to his feet.

"I tell thee, Ram Singh, I will not listen! I am tired to death of complaints and laziness. Get you to work and leave off whining to the Sirkar for remission. The cotton crop is good enough. Get you gone!"

The man backed away with another salaam, and unhitching his horse, Howard flung himself into the saddle.

"I tell you I will not forget!" he shouted roughly as he rode off, and had the satisfaction of seeing Ram Singh questioned by the mullah before he was five hundred yards away. He laughed to himself as he pictured how the worthy priest would listen to cursings of the Government in general and Howard Sahib in particular, and rode home quite satisfied with Ram Singh's perspicacity.

As he drew near the station, however, he began to think more seriously of what he had heard, remembering what Zyarulla had told Marguerite not so many months before. Undoubtedly Wynnegate's skill as a healer had travelled widely, and it was natural that these ignorant tribesmen should consider him as great a doctor to stay the cholera as surgeon to restore their wounded.

He guessed that Wynnegate would take no notice even if he warned him, and indeed it would be practically impossible for him to take any care of himself in these days, yet undoubtedly too there was an element of danger in the situation.

Rather undecided he dismounted at his own door and went into the bungalow to find his wife waiting for him, pale and anxious.

“Fred, Major Crawford is down!”

“Crawford! Good Lord! Is he bad?”

“Yes, I’m afraid so. He’s here.”

“Margot!”

Howard stood staring at her in dismay and Marguerite nodded.

“He came up a couple of hours ago to ask for some chlorodyne Captain Wynnegate had left here this morning and he’d only just arrived when Captain Wynnegate followed him to see Desmond”—Desmond was in bed with a touch of fever—“and Major Crawford fainted. I wouldn’t hear of him being taken off—I couldn’t! There is no room in the hospital, and there is no one to nurse him at his bungalow.”

“You’re not going to do it,” Howard put in roughly.

“You’ll just clear out into his place and take Delphine with you. Desmond’s practically all right now, and I can look after Crawford myself.”

Marguerite was silent for a moment, then laid her hands on her husband’s arm.

“Fred dear—wait. I’ve sent Delphine. I quite agree that we mustn’t expose her to the risk, but for myself it’s got to be. I’ve been looking after him now, so there’s no sense in sending me away. You’ve already far more than you can do, so please don’t say any more. Delphine is going to Lahore. I wired to Lady Cynthia, and she will send to meet her there. It’s the only thing to do.”

Horrified as he was Howard realised the truth of her words and finally agreed to them, only stipulating that Crawford's own servant should do most of the nursing, and Marguerite should take all the care of herself she could. Even as they talked there came an urgent summons for him, and he had to go out again, leaving his wife to bathe and change and seek Delphine.

She found her curled up in a chair in her room instructing Pundita in the packing of her trunks—a pale, rather silent figure with set lips and shadowy eyes, and wisely forbore to make any comment on either looks or silence. Delphine herself, stunned as she was by the turn affairs had taken, could not but realise that Marguerite was right. Could they have changed places she would have acted in precisely the same way, that she knew, and there was nothing for it but to submit. Later, when all was ready and she was waiting to start rebellion surged hot in her soul—a futile enough passion for the die was cast.

She was to leave at eight, and Ruthven, who was able to travel, was to accompany her to Lahore, where General Molyneux would send to meet her, and now she sat for the last time in the shadowy green drawing-room, watching the clock with curiously dilated eyes and waiting for Wynnegate to come. Marguerite had told him of the decision duly an hour or two earlier and, as yet, he had not been round. In half an hour the tonga would clank into the compound and Delphine would start—was he going to let her leave without one word of farewell?

White-lipped and silent the girl waited, and the first person to arrive was Ruthven, gaunt and hollow-cheeked, needing his two months' leave badly enough, and Delphine, utterly unable to talk to him, lay back in a further corner of the room vainly trying to pay attention to Desmond, who had only got up for a few

hours to see the last of her. The quarter before eight had just gone when there was a clatter of hoofs, hasty steps on the verandah and Wynnegate entered with Howard. Desmond was no fool, and seeing the look that gleamed for an instant in his cousin's eyes, he made some muttered excuse to leave her and went over to Ruthven, laughing at his own unsteady movements, and Wynnegate, after greeting Marguerite, came over to Delphine and dropped into a chair beside her.

"This is a sorry ending to your visit here," he said. "But it's the only possible thing to do."

Words and manner were formal, almost casual. Delphine gave a little gasp and sat up suddenly. Was this all her going meant? But he was speaking, still in that undisturbed voice of everyday.

"You're going straight on to the Hills, aren't you? Mrs. Howard will let me know how you are."

The girl's pride came to her rescue at that; if, after all, he cared so little, was she going to let him see she cared more?

Glancing across at the clock she nodded.

"Oh, yes, you'll hear from Margot, I expect. It is an unfortunate end, as you say, and I hate to leave everyone in this anxiety and misery. One feels like a rat deserting the sinking ship—though Kala Ismail Khan hasn't quite reached that stage, has it?"

"Not quite. Are you staying long out here, or shall you go back?"

"Go back, I expect. I think, after all, I'm rather tired of India, and I'm sure my father will be relieved if I decide to return. I've been away too long."

Surely this was some hideous nightmare. This empty exchange of formal remarks, meaningless enough to them both? She was too hurt and stunned to see the beads of perspiration on Wynnegate's forehead, and even as the last words passed her lips, the noise

of tonga-wheels without proclaimed the cessation of a situation grown unbearable.

As if in a dream she rose to her feet.

"There's the tonga," she said. "Everything's ready. Don't come out, please. Fred will see me off. Good-bye."

She held out her hand, cold as ice despite the torrid heat of the night, and for the first time looked directly at him.

"Good luck to Kala Ismail Khan and your hospital," she said, then suddenly stopped, for his hand closed on hers in a grip that hurt, and the veins swelled on his forehead like cords.

"Delphine," he began, hoarsely—"Delphine——"

Only her name, yet the sense of nightmare vanished and she knew he cared whether she went or stayed.

"It's good-bye," she said. "Oh, please—don't look at me like that or—or I shall disgrace myself. D'you think I *want* to go?"

Marguerite, turning from farewells to Ruthven, was coming across to them; it was too late for speech. Regardless of the others, careless of anything now but his own desperate need, Wynnegate stooped, pulled Delphine to him and kissed her full on the mouth, the long close passionate kiss of a lover, there, before them all.

Two minutes later, Delphine, cheeks scarlet, breath coming unevenly over parted lips, was driving away in the darkness, and Howard seeing the drawing-room empty, went into the shady space and found Wynnegate there, his head buried on his arms on the table.

For a moment he hesitated whether to withdraw or stay. Like the others, he had been amazed by Wynnegate's behaviour, but what he saw now disarmed his momentary anger. After that instant's hesitation he made up his mind and went over to that silent figure.

"Wynnegate—dear fellow—I didn't guess—" He broke off lamely enough, and Wynnegate lifted his head.

"How should you?" he said, a trifle thickly. "Don't take any notice of me. I'm off my balance, I think. Quinine and bed is about all I'm fit for."

Howard looked critically at him, saw the haggard lines about the mouth and the dry feverishly bright eyes, and nodded.

"I quite agree," he said. "We don't want you knocking up. I can give you a shake-down here—in—in the room Delphine had."

For the life of him he could not help the touch of constraint coming into his voice and he felt, rather than saw, the shudder that ran through his friend's form at the words. Still this was no time for hesitation, and, taking Wynnegate by the arm, he marched him off, the latter stumbling almost like a drunken man.

"You're pretty nearly tucked up," he said. "I'll go and get you a stiff drink—no, it's not fever, it's sheer want of sleep. Get into bed just as fast as you can."

He went off to get the "peg," returning with a stiff brandy and soda to find Wynnegate on the floor in a dead faint.

Chapter IX

DELPHINE gave a last brush to her hair, stood while her maid slipped the scarlet chiffon frock over her head and fastened it, then impatient as always at being waited on, hurried out of the room and down the stairs, pausing on a wide half-landing to draw aside the curtains and look out into the night.

It was mid-January, and in a cloudless heaven the full moon made the country-side almost as light as day; the air still and freezing was diamond-clear, and full, so it seemed, of radiance as though itself held some luminous secret rivalling the moonlight.

Against a sky of sapphire the bare branches and twigs of the trees lifted themselves in a delicate tracery of shadow, and beneath, the lawns lay bathed in silver and glittering with frost.

Already Delphine was late, yet she could not forbear staying a moment or two to gaze out at the beauty of the winter night, and as she stayed the thoughts leaped southward across four thousand miles of land and sea to a country where the winter moonlight glittered not on level lawns but on towering peaks of eternal snow. How glorious those winter nights had been—nights before any thought of love, with its passionate pain and regret, came to trouble waking and sleeping hours alike.

A gong booming through the house recalled her to present matters, and letting the curtains fall to, she went on downstairs to a big low-ceilinged hall, lit by lamps in wall sconces and the leaping flames of a wood-fire. From an open door behind the staircase came the sound of voices and laughter, and in sudden defiance, knowing everyone was waiting for her, Delphine went to it, step slower than usual, chin held high.

"Ah, there you are——" a voice said, as she appeared. "Then we are all here, so we may as well go in. Bruce, will you take in Mrs. Harland?"

General Sir Bruce Molyneux offered his arm to the black-clad, incredibly slender woman to whom he had been talking, and led the way across the fire-lit hall to the dining-room, and almost at the tail of the short procession came Delphine in her scarlet frock—a vivid enough picture, prescient of storm, with her brilliant eyes and look of eager vitality. In the panelled room, amid the black and white of the men's clothes, and as it happened the soft dark hues of the other women's attire, Delphine was a splash of colour and life—a flame that was almost like an insult, so sharply did it contrast with all around.

Sir Bruce, home on leave and spending the New Year in his old Sussex house, sat at the head of the table, talking to his partner, but ever and anon casting a rather worried look at his niece, and his wife opposite seemed to echo those glances though with more of solicitude and less of uneasiness.

It was only a small party gathered there, but names of high officials were numbered in it, and Delphine, strangely quiet for her, sat watching the different men, with a look on her pale eager face that puzzled her partner as well as her relatives.

Because the party was chiefly an official one, and because it was small and rather difficult to entertain, there were only one or two young people—Delphine herself, a nephew of Lady Molyneux's by name Henry Vigors, who was making a brilliant reputation as a novelist, and a god-daughter of one of the guests, Dorothy Vane, a débutante of the previous year and a beauty. The novelist took her in, and to Delphine's share had fallen a certain Sir O'Hanlon Moore, a retired Indian Commander-in-Chief, a stout, white-moustached man, full of

vigour, despite his sixty-seven years, with a glance still fiery and a deep, abiding love for the work and the country he had left. Of the other guests two in particular interested Delphine, for one was none other than Angus Bristowe, the ex-Minister for Education, and the other was a military commander of high rank, General Freer. Mrs. Freer his wife, Mrs. Harland, the widow of a great financier and a prominent figure in the social world, Lady Cynthia Molyneux, Dorothy Vane and Delphine herself, made up the feminine portion of the house-party, and it promised to Delphine to be an interesting one.

When dessert was on the table the conversation had turned almost generally to India, for nearly every guest had resided there at some time of his or her life, and the military situation in the North at least was tense; war threatened along the whole Frontier, and had become already a certainty in the North-West Province.

Delphine's thoughts, for the moment distracted by some remark of Dorothy Vane's, were recalled sharply by General Freer's penetrating tones.

"My dear lady"—he was speaking to his hostess—"discipline is already far too lax. The criticism that has lately been levelled at the Indian Medical Service seems to me in the worst possible taste as allowing the lay mind to interfere with officialdom. Doesn't your husband agree?"

Lady Cynthia glanced down the table.

"Do you, Bruce?" she said. "General Freer does not approve of the criticism that has lately been appearing in the Press."

"Of India?" Bruce Molyneux knew Mrs. Harland's financial interest in the country, and took up the subject with alacrity. "Quite right. It's useless and unnecessary."

In the instant's silence Delphine spoke with startling unexpectedness.

"Are you sure, General Freer, that it is unnecessary?" All eyes turned to her, and Sir O'Hanlon's gleamed with sudden interest at her tone beneath his white brows; however, he made no comment, but waited to hear General Freer's reply. That personage, his whole keen face hardening a trifle, looked at his questioner with an expression that barely veiled the resentment he felt at her daring.

"It would be curious if I were not," he said, with an edge in his voice. "I have always considered myself capable of judgment in a matter that concerns me very closely." Delphine's brilliant glance did not falter.

"You consider the Indian Army fully equipped—I am referring to medical matters—for any contingency?"

The question coming from a mere girl of twenty-seven was so curious that conversation languished and Sir Bruce's look of uneasiness deepened.

"Most certainly. You are interested in the matter, Miss Molyneux?"

"Very. Do you refer to mere internal affairs, or to demands more exigent?"

"The Indian Government is prepared for any campaign that may arise either with the Frontier tribes or otherwise.—May I suggest that you need not be troubled about military affairs to such an extent?"

His voice was icy; that his breeding alone enabled him to answer with sufficient courtesy was obvious, and Bruce Molyneux would have tried to turn the conversation had not old Sir O'Hanlon suddenly taken a hand in it.

"That's an interesting point you've raised, Miss Molyneux," he said, and there was approval in his keen old glance as it rested for the moment on the girl beside him. "Whether the all-important matter of medical personnel is kept up to mobilisation strength? It would be interesting to have your opinion, General Freer."

Freer turned to him with an alteration in manner; the conversation annoyed him, but in Sir O'Hanlon he had an opponent of repute, and was not obliged to defend or explain his words to one whom he considered impertinent in questioning them.

"In event of any very serious disturbance, any additional personnel would be available from England," he said, "that, of course, is an understood thing."

"Um—yes. And if England was unable to furnish that personnel?"

"Are such circumstances conceivable?"

"Quite—to my mind."

"You mean in event of European war. Are you a believer in that bogey, Sir O'Hanlon?"

The other laughed, perhaps to take the scorn off his question, but the old man remained grave.

"I confess without shame that I am," he said. "Only to me it is not a bogey, but a certain, very serious fact."

"Indeed?" Freer's clipped grey moustache twitched as his lip curled in a smile not quite complimentary to the other's opinion. "That surprises me. The contingency is too remote surely to be regarded as a serious reason for condemning the present system of the Indian Medical Service."

Sir O'Hanlon's fiery glance held the other's for a moment with a look in it that sent a dull red mounting to Freer's cheek; then he turned to Delphine.

"I interrupted you, I fear," he said, with old-fashioned politeness. "Pray forgive me."

"It is for me to thank you for taking an interest in my somewhat raw opinions," Delphine answered, and old blue eyes and fiery youthful brown met in a glance of mutual liking and respect. "I'm afraid General Freer is displeased at my daring to hold any."

Freer bit his lip; Delphine's voice was clear and her words were meant for everyone's ears.

"Please do not misjudge me in that manner, Miss Molyneux," he said, trying, with no great success, to speak lightly. "Your questions are interesting to me because I cannot help wondering what prompts them."

The glove was thrown down and the spectators of the challenge watched and listened with some eagerness for it to be taken up.

"A desire to acquaint myself with the truth," Delphine said, "whether financial retrenchment or human life is the most valuable."

For a full moment complete silence reigned, the silence of dismay, amusement at her daring, displeasure or approval according to the opinions of those who had listened. Bruce Molyneux's handsome face flushed, his wife fidgeted with the long rope of pearls she wore. Mrs. Harland, who loved a new sensation above everything else, leant forward staring at Delphine in quite frank delight, Vigors looked amused, his companion perplexed, Mr. Bristowe intensely annoyed. General Freer, himself, was rigid, only his cold eyes betrayed the temper of his mind at the inquiry—the import of which he could not pretend to misunderstand.

Sir O'Hanlon's face Delphine could not see. But she thought she heard a murmur of "Good girl!" beside her as she waited for her reply. It came at last, in a voice that General Freer's staff knew well enough.

"May I suggest that your question is not one that requires an answer, Miss Molyneux?" he said, when the silence had grown very nearly intolerable. "Government, whether military or civil, is a matter—at present, at all events—for masculine, not feminine attention."

A curious light flickered in Delphine's eyes, and the fine bones of the jaw and chin were for the moment clearly apparent in the pallor of her face; then she smiled.

"I appreciate your tact, General Freer," she said, and

observing Lady Cynthia's distressed signal rose from her chair. They were hardly in the drawing-room before Mrs. Harland laid a transparent hand on her arm, drawing her to a distant sofa.

"My dear, come and talk to me," she said. "How delightfully you trapped that odious man! I loathe the conceited creature, and you have disturbed him most successfully. Do tell me why you wished to annoy him?"

Delphine shrugged her shoulders.

"I didn't wish to annoy him," she said. "I wished to decry the system he represents."

"You clever child! Why?"

"I was brought up in official circles; the type of mind irritates me—and I have been living recently in a distant Frontier station."

"Really? How tremendously exciting! Then your opinions are the result of observation?"

"Exactly. It is a pity he shirked that last question of mine," she added reflectively. "An answer, either way, would have been so instructive."

"General Freer is a type," Mrs. Harland remarked, "and that type only admits the existence of woman as a ministering angel—white or black—with the ministering kept well in the background. Not as an antagonist worthy of his sword." Delphine's odd little laugh greeted the words.

"Yes. Wife or mistress—it's very much the same with a man like that. I do not think he will forgive me easily."

"That will not keep you awake o' nights," her companion said. "You remind me of a sudden flare of the brass in an orchestra that has been using only strings. D'you know quite how unexpected you are in a house like this? As startling as a Ravel chord in a nice respectable *Mendelssohn Lieder*?"

"So startling as that?" Delphine's tone showed her

appreciation of the remark. "Poor Uncle Bruce, I did not regard him as quite so old-fashioned."

"Not old-fashioned. Merely typical. I wonder what the conversation is at this moment in the dining-room? The ripples your stone cast are washing the banks somewhat stormily, I imagine. It would interest me to know."

And it would have interested her infinitely more had she heard Sir O'Hanlon's voice at that moment holding general attention and seen his face through the faint blue haze of smoke.

"Your niece's opinions expressed so frankly just now interested me very much, Molyneux," he was saying, "since I spent four years of my appointment calling attention to the deficiencies of the Indian Army as regards military modern equipment, especially with regard to machine guns, heavy howitzers, wireless and air equipment—and, above all, transport and medical complements. Also to the insufficient sums voted for practice ammunition. Those representations being practically ignored and my wishes being generally overridden by the Finance Department, I sent in my resignation." He paused a moment, then continued: "I imagine, however, that even so, I may have laid myself open to censure for not having stated my reasons for resigning to the Secretary of State, and for want of definite action, earlier in my tenure of office. In the light of recent European developments I do not hold myself blameless. It will be interesting to see whether the general public endorses my opinion should the condition of affairs come—as I believe it very shortly will—to their knowledge."

Later Delphine sang a number of old English, Scotch and Irish songs, delighting Sir O'Hanlon by the latter and making herself so generally useful as an entertainer that for the time being her transgressions at dinner were forgotten—by all save General Freer, who disapproved

of her thoroughly. The full short skirts of the scarlet chiffon frock—its very colour an outrage—the slim extent of ankle, the short wavy mop of brown hair falling picturesquely about the pale eager face—all was an offence to him, and he showed his disapproval by totally ignoring her existence.

Later still Lady Cynthia, finding her for the moment alone, spoke distressfully.

“Delphine, what possessed you to annoy General Freer like that?”

Delphine met her aunt’s worried glance with a smile that was reassuring, almost motherly.

“Dear Aunt Cynthia, really I can’t quite explain—I don’t even know. Only I saw things at Kala Ismail Khan that made me angry. You know you were really rather glad I stood up to him.”

“If it had been anywhere else!” Lady Cynthia exclaimed. “Of course he’s an odious man, but after all he’s rather a great one, and you were really impertinent to him about his own work.”

“Red tape!” sighed Delphine. “Oh, if we *do* go to war over here what a shaking-up such men will get! Poor Aunt Cynthia! I behaved very badly to you, didn’t I? Is Uncle Bruce too furious with me?”

“He’s not quite pleased,” his wife admitted with some hesitation, “but he’ll soon get over it. Only—do be careful to-morrow, dear—don’t irritate the creature again.”

“I’ll be dumb in his presence,” Delphine promised. “Some little devil was at my elbow to-night—and I don’t regret a word. Good-night, you long-suffering aunt. I will be so good to-morrow.”

She went off to her room and made straight for the curtained windows, longing for the moonlight and silence. Both greeted her as she flung back the chintz, and, dismissing her maid, slipped into a fur coat, opened the sash and pulled a chair to a convenient place. Re-

viewing the evening she was not ill pleased with it. Certain things had come to her knowledge, and she had gained Sir O'Hanlon to her side. To-morrow her promise not to bait General Freer should hold good; on Sunday she proposed to find out a little more, if possible discover the real kernel of the matter. Who was responsible for the refusals that had so handicapped Gervase Wynnegate? Was it this man, or somebody beneath his status? If the latter, he should have it brought to his notice what she was determined upon, but if the former she admitted herself to be helpless. Yet even so, it would be a relief to know. And Gervase himself? What was he doing now? What had the winter brought for him? In Marguerite's letters there was an occasional mention of his name and his work, but from himself no word or sign. That fierce kiss, that even now as she thought of it made her lips tingle and her blood run hotly, had been the last sign he had given—nothing had bridged the gulf that time and distance had created. He had dropped out of her life, and intentionally; so much was plain by the absence of any message in the letters he knew Marguerite wrote. Delphine faced this fact as she had faced all the other facts in her life—boldly; yet she confessed to herself that such facing had, in this particular instance, taken something from her. Whether it was youth or hope she did not quite know; all she did know was that she would never be quite the same again.

For an hour or so she sat in the moonlight with her thoughts for company; then rising, she closed window and curtains, switched on the lights and poked the red-hot heart of the fire to leaping brilliance. Such a reverie was a dangerous luxury not to be often indulged in. As she stood before her mirror unfastening the scarlet frock she saw her face strained and paler even than usual; looking closer she noticed how obvious were the fine lines about her eyes.

Chapter X

As it happened Delphine was destined not to keep her promise with regard to General Freer, for a reason quite unforeseen. No less a person than Mr. Bristowe, who felt that the whole order of things had been attacked, and therefore needed defending.

It was at tea-time on the Sunday, when everyone was assembled in the wainscoted hall with its leaping fire and air of homeliness and comfort—a place that seemed to reassure him as to the stability of English home-life and English tradition. He would have repudiated the idea that he required reassurance, but Sir O'Hanlon Moore's conversation on the previous evening long after everyone but himself had gone to bed, had left a disagreeable sense of insecurity behind it. Looking about him now, Mr. Bristowe strove to recapture the comfortable philosophy that had served him all his days. Beyond the two wide windows on either side of the double entrance doors lay a stretch of lawn and tree-studded country, peaceful and green beneath a clear sky of wintry gold. From where he sat he could just catch a glimpse of a crimson ball of fire sinking behind the home woods, its flame gilding the bare tree-twigs and flooding the sky with radiance. A couple of robins were perched on a bush quite near the windows peering inquisitively in through the glass—all out of doors was quiet and beautifully still, and within all was still more comforting. The oaken walls reflecting here and there in their panelling the crimson of the sunset, the generous fire of sweet-scented apple logs, the collie stretched luxuriantly on the hearth, the tea-table with its gleam of old purple and gold Crown

Derby, the very kettle hissing steam from its silver spout. All spoke for stability, dignified comfort, shelter and calm everyday life. Not a sign of storm, within or without, to mar the glowing western sky or the peaceful domesticity of the hall—and to the north-east, hidden from sight as yet by distant wooded hills, a great bank of cloud rose threateningly, heavy and dark with snow, blotting out the soft blue and the early rising moon, herald of bitter tempest.

Dorothy Vane, Henry Vigors, and Delphine had been for a tramp over the frosty footpaths and the cold stinging air had brought an unwonted colour to Delphine's cheeks as she came downstairs after changing heavy shoes and stockings for more suitable indoor wear; she was wearing a skirt of her favourite winter colour, red, of a dark shade of crimson, made in some soft, thick material, with a white silk shirt and a tie of the same shade knotted under the low open collar. Her boyishness was even more marked than usual, and more than one of the assembled party thought it even more attractive. Dorothy Vane proved an effective foil, for her beauty was of the classical order, her colouring that of the lily and rose, her hair like ripe corn. She had changed her walking things for an indoor frock of the picture style, made in clinging old-gold satin, and as Delphine took a seat close by her, Sir O'Hanlon gave a little grunt of pleasure. The extraordinary contrast pleased his connoisseur's taste.

Tea, with its country-house adjuncts of hot cakes of many kinds, sandwiches, and jam for those who were young and lusty enough still to care for it, began pleasantly. No doubt it would have ended on the same agreeable note but for Mr. Bristowe's uneasiness, and, resenting such discomfit, he set about unburdening his mind to anyone who would listen. Being, as a rule, a rather brilliant talker, everyone became

interested, and presently he and Freer had the stage to themselves.

Delphine, who had been sharing a cake with the collie, miles away with her thoughts, was recalled from her abstraction by hearing Mrs. Freer's thin voice saying in shocked tones:

"But, my dear Mr. Bristowe, surely you are mistaken."

The thought of Mr. Bristowe mistaken was rather a pleasing one to Delphine, and she proceeded to pay attention. Mr. Bristowe shook his head.

"Alas, if only I were! But there is no room for doubt. He positively believes there will be war, and war that will not only involve us, but all the civilised nations of the world."

"How horrible!" Mrs. Freer remarked, as though she referred to an insect she disliked. "But after all, we must not be despondent. We have the navy, and that is quite competent enough to protect the nation."

"Possibly, possibly." Mr. Bristowe's gloom was being deepened rather than lightened by speech. "But of course it is quite true that our principal food supply comes from abroad. That is a question for profound thought."

He took two sandwiches as he spoke and ate them with gloom as though they had been a religious duty, and Mrs. Harland precipitated herself into the conversation.

"Germany, I am sure!" she said. "I can see by your expression, dear Mr. Bristowe. But who was the prophet of evil who has so disturbed you?"

"I was."

"Sir O'Hanlon's voice made them all start, and Delphine, pushing the collie gently away, drew her chair a trifle nearer the little group.

"I was talking in the smoking-room last night..

Sorry I've disturbed you so, Bristowe—but the situation isn't one of my making, I'm glad to say."

" You're rather a Jeremiah I fear, Sir O'Hanlon," Mrs. Freer said sweetly. " Isn't it a pity to fan the idea of war in people's minds ?"

" It is certainly useless," was the old man's bluff retort, and Delphine, remembering his murmured " Good girl," during her passage of arms at the dinner table on Friday evening, came gently to his assistance.

" The old question of adequate preparation," she said. " I must say my experience—a very limited one on the N.W. Frontier—has told me that such a happy state of things simply doesn't exist."

To do Delphine justice, she had not intended her remark for General Freer's ear, but, as though some malignant sprite had deliberately attracted his attention, he swung round in his chair and looked across at her.

" I am sure your experience is most valuable," he said. " Will you not give me the benefit of it ? I should be grateful to receive such first-hand information."

Poor Lady Cynthia bit her lip and felt ready to cry with vexation. Little had she guessed how stormy two elements of her New Year's party were to be, and Delphine, for her sake, made an heroic effort to reply in as pacific a manner as possible.

" I would not wish to weary you," she said, meeting his angry eyes. " My—as I said—very limited experience would have no interest for you. You know it already."

He leant back in his chair, still watching her.

" Surely you are too modest, Miss Molyneux," he said. " Have you followed the feminine privilege of changing your opinions since last night ?"

" Is it so essentially feminine to change one's

opinions, General Freer? If so, what a pity your sex doesn't occasionally follow the example of mine."

"You were ready to champion what you believed to be a lost cause yesterday," he said, ignoring her reply. "Surely you have not lost faith in yourself—or your experience—since then?"

She moved a little, stretching out a slim hand to the cigarette-box, and taking a cigarette, lit it with a deliberation that infuriated him.

"No, not that," she said, throwing the match away. "But during several quiet hours' thinking last night I came to the conclusion that it is quite useless to try to convince most people of anything that is contrary to their wishes."

"You think me such a bigot, then?"

"There is a very obvious retort to that, General Freer," she said, and in spite of her rising temper a smile of mischief danced for a moment in her eyes, "Only—to make it would be too childishly discourteous."

Vigors laughed outright at that, rather startling the others, and Freer bowed with a little ironical smile.

"How kind of you to refrain from hurting my feelings," he said. "But I assure you they are quite impervious to such—shall we say schoolroom—wit."

"So I imagined," Delphine rejoined, knocking the ash of her cigarette into her saucer. "Perhaps that was the reason I refrained, not the other."

"And we are not to have the benefit of your knowledge?"

"Do you wish for it?"

"Have I not said so?"

"Very well then." She sat upright suddenly and looked straight into his eyes. "Such as it is you shall. I spent seven months in a Frontier station, fifteen miles from a railroad. There was a native city crowded

as such always are, there was a biggish garrison for such a distant place, by reason of exceptionally turbulent neighbours, there was a camp of three thousand men only seven miles distant working on the new canal works, men of every caste, of every race throughout India, with Chinese coolies thrown in. For those human beings, all of them, there was one medical officer and a hospital consisting of three wards, containing normally five beds each, no proper operating theatre, no facilities for research of any kind, and no modern equipment. The medical officer had to rely on stale drugs, old-fashioned instruments, barely enough antiseptics—unless he chose to find others out of his own private income.

“When I left cholera was raging. The garrison had lost nearly half its men, the natives died in the streets like flies, and lay there because there was no means to bury them.”

“Did it occur to you to ask this long-suffering medical officer why he did not send in a request for equipment and adequate assistance?”

“I heard why without asking. He had done so so often that he became a nuisance, and his last letter was answered by a threat. And that is in peace time, General Freer.”

Freer looked at her.

“I should suggest that there is quite certainly some explanation if the matter were looked into. Probably this man’s record is not satisfactory enough for his word to bear very great weight with the men who know the truth.”

The colour flashed up into Delphine’s face, her lips parted, and she half rose from her chair, then with an effort checked the torrent of words that clamoured for utterance and dropped back again. Argument was useless to a man of this calibre; she could do no good

and might do harm; and with an odd little gesture of resignation she turned her attention to the collie, who was trying to attract it by gently shoving nose and liquid amber eyes. She longed several times in the next twenty-four hours to take Sir O'Hanlon into her confidence, but decided it would not do; it would be asking him to betray his order, and she knew quite enough of the veteran code of honour to reject any thought that he would do that.

Instead, when she left Sussex and returned to town she made up her mind to talk to her father at the earliest possible moment, for somehow, deep-rooted in her mind, was a conviction that Wynnegate needed help—and first she must know more about her own affairs, which only her father could tell her. If only Wynnegate would write! She realised now that though he loved her, he would never ask her to marry him; and he was right. She agreed to that even though it hurt her. He as a doctor knew better than to inflict on a hapless future generation what had been inflicted on her. Of course, there was always the alternative that there would be no future generation in her case, presupposing they married; but it was not an alternative to gamble on. And she pulled herself up shortly and shrugged her shoulders. After all, what was she troubling about? Was she not building on a very slight foundation—a very pleasant friendliness, an ardent look or two, one kiss! Men gave all without thinking. Not men like Gervase Wynnegate, so her better self whispered, and all the way in the train she considered the situation as she had considered it dozens of times before, and came to the same conclusion. Whether he loved her or not she loved him, and that alone demanded she should help him if she could. It was snowing when she arrived in London, and a bitter northerly wind was scouring the streets; and as she

drove through the streets to her home in Sloane Street she watched the whirling flakes with the delight of a child, so good were they to see after the sun-scorched wastes of Kala Ismail Khan. There was no one at home; her father would not return till six-thirty, and she had tea brought up at once and enjoyed the solitude, for her own company had no terrors for her.

Molyneux was writing as she entered his study a few minutes before eight, but on her arrival he pushed aside his papers and rose to greet her. If his life had been secretly shattered, it had at least given him a daughter he adored, though he did not let her guess it. That adoration was about the only human trait in his character.

Despite their tragedy, the years had treated him well, for though his hair was quite grey it was thick and strong as ever. He wore it brushed back from his high forehead, and the look of distinction that had always been so noticeable a feature in his appearance was even more apparent now than ten years before. The aquiline handsome face was more hawk-like than ever, the steel-blue eyes colder, the curve of the lips more intolerant; the man's pride, deepened in self-defence, had become an impenetrable armour.

He smiled now when his daughter entered, and the smile altered the whole face, so charming was it, and taking her outstretched hands kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"Ah, Delphine, not snowed up! I was afraid the weather might be too bad for you to travel."

"I'm too old a traveller to mind weather," she rejoined. "You are dining at home, are you not?"

"Yes. I kept the evening clear."

"That was kind of you. I am glad to be back. Uncle Bruce had a peculiarly annoying type of guest at Bracknells. Quite my most disliked."

She sketched the party for him as they dined, listened to his own filling-in of details with regard to both Freer and Bristowe, and heard with much interest of the impending General Election. Her fortnight out of town had put her behind the times. When at last dessert was on the table and the servants left them, she turned to the matter that occupied her mind.

"I want to ask you a question," she said. "I'm afraid it's rather intimate and painful, but I so dearly wish to know the truth. May I?"

He looked at her in some curiosity.

"You may ask me anything you choose," he said. "If it is as you say you probably have a right to know."

"That is good of you," she said. "It is this. When you married my mother did you know that there was insanity in the family?"

The man's whole figure stiffened; the question had indeed been both intimate and painful, and for the moment he was too taken aback to answer. Delphine, very pale, watched him and saw that her words had been a blow, so she said nothing, only waited, leaning forward with her hands lightly interlocked on the shining surface of the table.

At last, after a silence that seemed to have lasted hours, Molyneux spoke.

"No," he said, "I discovered that fact later."

"After Torquil was born?"

"Yes—after Torquil was born."

She nodded, as if she confirmed something to herself.

"Should you have married her if you had known?"

He fingered the stem of his glass absently, eyes staring at nothing.

"No," he said at last, "I should not."

Again she nodded.

"You would not have thought it right?"

"I should not have thought it right."

He echoed her words, his voice cold and level, and she had to summon her courage to go on, for his manner did not invite further questioning.

"You would think of the children?"

"Yes," he said, and looked at her. "I should think of the children. Is there anything else you want to ask me, Delphine? This conversation is painful."

Her expression, which by reason of all it hid had been almost as hard as his, softened instantly at the last words.

"Dear, forgive me. I feared so—and there is one more thing. I want to know what Dr. Charles Salmon thought of my mother's case."

He looked at her sharply, the arrogance in his face and bearing very noticeable.

"How do you know Dr. Salmon was consulted?"

"I will tell you in a moment. Please answer me."

"He gave no hope. She suffered from a disease of the brain that is particularly malignant in type—a kind of growth that rapidly covers the grey matter of the brain which nothing can arrest. She was a doomed woman long before she saw any doctor. I have answered your question, Delphine. Answer mine."

"I heard it—rather unexpectedly, this last summer," she said, "from someone who knew my mother."

"Who was it?"

"A man whom I believe she consulted before she went to Dr. Salmon. His name is Gervase Wynnegate."

"Gervase Wynnegate . . . so you have met him. What was he doing in India?"

Molyneux's voice betrayed no emotion, yet Delphine scanned his face with sudden suspicion.

"He is attached to the I.M.C. with honorary rank as captain," she said. "Stationed at Kala Ismail Khan"

"That is a very curious coincidence," Molyneux said. "Very curious. Did you see much of him?"

"A good deal. You knew him very well, I suppose?"

"Not very. He was my wife's choice—not mine. Did he ever tell you why he left London?"

"No," she said, wondering a little at the smile on her father's face.

"Were you intimate?"

Her hands tightened suddenly on each other, and Molyneux saw the movement. Saw, too, that for a moment she hesitated, and repeated his question harshly.

"Were you intimate?"

"Yes," she said.

"And he did not mention why he gave up a successful practice, why he threw away one of the most brilliantly successful reputations of the day?"

"No."

"It did not occur to you that it was a strange thing to do?"

Under the mockery of tone and glance she wanted to tremble, but it was not in her to show fear, and she spoke quite steadily.

"I imagine it was for the chance of active service with all the surgical experience such a service gives."

Molyneux leant forward suddenly, leaning his elbows on the table.

"Shall I tell you why?" he said.

A wild longing to refuse such knowledge rose in her, but she stifled it knowing it useless, and met his glance with unconscious defiance.

"Yes—if you think it will interest me," she said.

He laughed, a laugh that made her nerves tingle.

"It will certainly interest you," he said, "since you were friends. Gervase Wynnegate left England nearly

ten years ago because I found my wife alone with him in his house at one o'clock in the morning."

" Ah !"

It was hardly an articulate syllable so much as a gasp. Delphine shrank as if he had struck her, staring at him with eyes black with horror, her very lips white, and Molyneux, reading the shock it had been, cursed in his heart and made an end of his work.

" Her condition saved him from an appearance as co-respondent," he said. " It was luck he did not deserve. I admit now in the light of my wife's tragic illness that I do not believe him guilty of adultery. But I believe him to have been a fool, which is more contemptible—not having the courage to sin outright, but letting his foolish conceit compromise a woman and his own good name. You met strange company in India, Delphine."

But Delphine was, for the time, past speech. The shock had been greater even than Molyneux guessed, for it struck at the root of things deep planted in her soul. She felt stunned, unable even to believe or disbelieve what she had just heard, and her father suddenly poured out a brandy liqueur and handed it to her.

" You are over-tired," he said. " Drink that."

She obeyed because it was too much trouble to resist, and Molyneux watched her, crushing down the pity that tried to rise in his heart. All these years he had entertained contempt and anger towards Wynnegate that had grown by what it had fed on. The blow to his pride he had never forgiven; it had not been a question of love. All love for the woman he had married had died years before, but his pride still remained—a pride of honour and of race curiously out of date in a too-tolerant world, and that evening in Brook Street had struck a deadly blow at the very root of his

life. A letter he had received only three days before from his sister had led to the resolve which he had tonight carried out and that now lay in a pocket of his dinner-jacket. His long anger against Wynnegate deepened as he watched his daughter's face, yet not for an instant did he regret his own action in telling her Wynnegate had ruined his own life by his folly; he should not ruin another. Marguerite's fear was justified, and Delphine must suffer, but better she should suffer now for a while than marry Wynnegate, so fiercely did he resent what he believed to be true. Abruptly he got to his feet.

"Put that friendship out of your life," he said harshly. "There are men worthier. Let us go into the drawing-room."

She rose without a word and followed him, some dim sense of pride beginning to force its way through her stifled senses; she was her father's daughter, and not even now could she be utterly false to that strain of him she had inherited.

In the flower-scented Empire room she helped herself to coffee, gave him his, and kept control of lips and fingers, but more than once the room swam and the lights receded into dim specks. It seemed hours later when he picked up a book and asked her if she cared to read, and she was able to give up the ghastly pretence and hide her ashen face behind its covers. The book was a rare one she had long wished for, and which Molyneux had succeeded in obtaining the previous day; it might have been blank paper in a cover of white cardboard for all difference she saw, and from the pages of his *Fortnightly* he watched her slender motionless figure and gripped his teeth in helpless anger.

Ten o'clock struck, then half-past. This evening, which would have been so rare an enjoyment in its solitude to them both, had circumstances been normal,

seemed to drag out its interminable length on leaden feet. When eleven struck he spoke harshly.

" You had better go to bed, Delphine. You've had a tiring day, and I have letters to write. Good-night."

He did not offer to kiss her as usual, and Delphine was grateful; with a murmured good-night she went out of the room and up to her own, suffered her maid to undress her and lay alone at last staring into the darkness.

Chapter XI

" HULLO, Wynnegate ! News !"

Crawford sat upright in his cane chair as Wynnegate came up the steps of the verandah, shouted for a peg and thumped his friend on the leg as he sat down close by.

" You see me here for five minutes only," he remarked. " The last comfortably dull minutes for a while, thank the stars. We're under orders, my son. Chaldara Fort is besieged, there's believed to be trouble in the Luner Hills—the whole jolly show is boiling ! Anyhow, the great thing is that we are in it !"

Wynnegate drank thirstily and jumped to his feet.

" If you can sit here, then, I can't," he exclaimed. " You'll be late for mess, and I want authentic news. Is it, or is it not ?"

" Orders haven't actually come yet," Crawford confessed. " But the C.O.'s expecting 'em every minute. Yes, I'm coming !" At mess, etiquette went to the winds and everyone talked shop, for eighteen months of routine work with hardly an excitement worth the name had made the garrison stale. Half-way through the meal came the long-expected telegram—orders that a detachment was to join the expeditionary force that was being mobilised under General Sir Bruce Molyneux. Wynnegate alone among the delighted men remained silent; the name of the commanding officer was a shock to him, reviving memories of the woman he had striven for two years to forget. Two years ! Two years since that summer in Kashmir, when he and Delphine had cemented their liking into friendship. What was she doing now ? Where was she ? What had happened ?

Crawford's hand on his shoulder roused him to hear his name spoken in curious tones.

"Wynnegate, wake up! Aren't you glad, man?" He threw off his abstraction with a start, realising how odd his manner must appear to the others.

"Yes, of course. I was thinking of something. So Molyneux's in command?"

"To join forces with him by the twelfth at latest in Peshawur. That gives us a day and to-night. Good man. I like promptitude."

"War! Good luck to it!" somebody cried, and there was a general laugh. Health was drunk to the expedition, there were a few moments spent in a last smoke and discussion, then the mess emptied and everyone set to work.

The September heat lay heavy on the land, but there was no time to think of that; men, guns, hospital detachment—all had to set out on their hurried march in a few hours, and soon after midnight the column started.

As usual, no one knew very much. The orders had come and were promptly obeyed, but all details were withheld; yet those in command guessed something serious was afoot by the hasty summons and the men required. The march was no easy thing, but it was carried out gallantly and the column entered Peshawur before sunset, dusty, fatigued, thirsty, but fit as anyone could wish.

There, all was bustle and apparent confusion. Troop trains converging from the southern line, freight trains conveying stores and ammunition; men, guns, horses, transport, hospital stores. All the paraphernalia for a campaign of some importance was gathered together, and every hour brought more men and more confusion.

Three brigades were to assemble, and Wynnegate learnt that to each brigade half a British and a whole

native Field Hospital were to be attached. He himself, to be in charge of the British half-unit attached to Molyneux's brigade, had enough to do. This brigade was to start at daybreak the next day. Hardly, however, had they arrived in Peshawur before other news came from Shabgarh, an advanced post some fifteen miles to the north-west; news amazing enough by reason of its tale of daring. The important mullah who was raising so much trouble among the tribes had urged another priest of his acquaintance to incite the people about Shabgarh to attack. Consequently, on this particular night a large band of fanatics numbering about six thousand crossed the Frontier, burned the village and attacked the fort.

The flying column formed by the troops from Kala Ismail Khan was ready, but they were absolutely wearied by a long march in the heat, and another was hastily mobilised and set off under an officer of the Punjab Infantry—a small enough force, numbering about seven hundred men, to encounter such overwhelming odds.

Not knowing what was about to happen men and officers took what rest they could, and just after eight in the morning Molyneux's brigade received orders to follow—his brigade including the column from Kala Ismail Khan.

Crawford was in high glee.

"We're in for it sooner than I hoped," he said to Wynnegate as the long train wound its way westward. "It's about time, too. The Government's vacillation must have played the devil with our prestige. Molyneux has got quite a decent reputation—hope it's deserved."

In the excessive heat the troops marched slowly, for no immediate urgency appeared, and it was towards eight in the evening when the sound of heavy firing was audible in the north. That put an end to deliberation,

and General Molyneux, leaving transport and guns behind, took two squadrons of Bengal Lancers and some Sikhs and struck off northward, Crawford commanding the Sikhs. Wynnegate, cursing his luck, had to remain in the hastily pitched camp, listening to the sounds of battle, till shortly after midnight those sounds grew fainter and fainter, and in the gloom of the early morning the troops reappeared with their wounded.

The casualties were light considering the enormous odds against which the British troops had had to fight, but Wynnegate was kept far too busy to grumble at his luck at being left behind in the actual attack.

An outrage of such importance as the invasion of British territory and the attack on a British fort could not be ignored; but, even so, the Indian Government in the hands of a weak Viceroy, and a Financial Secretary such as Sir William Ewartson, hesitated about the immediate punishment and, meanwhile, the camp hummed with impatient men and angry officers. Such fretting is a bad thing for native troops, and it was with keen relief that Crawford came to announce to Wynnegate the news just told him by his C.O. The whole force was to move forward into the Chota Valley, with Mutta, eight miles distant, as their base. The news caused the liveliest satisfaction throughout the entire force, and two days later the camp was reached at the entrance to the Chota Valley.

The actual place where camp was to be pitched was a comparatively pleasant spot, well in the open, yet affording certain cover, for the old fort of stone was still a sturdy place of refuge, and within the confines of the camp itself was a group of chenar trees showing that beneath the scorched surface of the land there was plenty of water.

The valley itself lay high and was very wide, opening on the north to show the pass of Nawagai, while away

in the south towered the great peak of the Koh-i-Mohr, a mountain of great beauty invisible further east. Half a mile to the southward one of the numerous tributaries of the Indus ran swiftly between the ricefields that formed a belt of refreshing green on either bank, and by the fort itself under the branches of the chenar trees was a spring of crystal clearness. Arrived at the fort the orders were to entrench, and soon a low wall some three and a half feet in height surrounded the entire camp, tents being pitched well inside it and horses and mules stabled on the further side of the stonework, and everyone expected a fairly peaceful night, for since crossing the frontier not a shot had been fired.

“ Wonder when we shall really get a sight of the beggars,” Carter said, speaking to Crawford as they sat lingering over dinner. “ It’s a heavenly night. Wonder they don’t——” His sentence was not finished, for at that instant three shots rang out, shattering the silence and fetching every man in the mess to his feet.

“ Hullo !” Houghton said, “ they’re not going to wait, after all !” And the words had hardly left his lips before a perfect fusillade came from the north side where the Guides’ Infantry were camped and a bullet struck the mess tent, ripping the canvas roof.

Instantly lights were put out and Molyneux went off to the threatened position to control the firing and take charge. A couple of star shells soaring into the darkness revealed the distant rocky hillsides, and for a few moments the enemy ceased fire, evidently startled and alarmed by the smell of the gas. Then the fire became worse and everyone was ordered to take what cover they could. Tents so recently erected were struck and the trenches were deepened and enlarged, but in the darkness—the night was too cloudy for the stars to give any light—it was difficult work, and as the parapet round the camp was so low, danger was great.

The necessity for regulating fire and sending messages involved much exposure, however, and before long several men had been wounded and two officers killed. Wynnegate with a couple of orderlies to help him was busy erecting a rough shelter of grain-bags, biscuit-boxes and so forth, when two stalwart Pathans loomed through the darkness stumbling over the rough ground and carrying a stretcher.

"Carter Sahib——" the foremost one explained as they set down their burden behind the improvised wall, and Wynnegate found the young lieutenant had been shot through the head. He was not dead, but the position of the wound and the shattering the back of the skull had sustained made it obvious that he could not live more than a few hours, and as Wynnegate began to cleanse and dress the wound, he found the bullet had penetrated the brain itself. Two wounded Dogras were brought in before he had finished, and another white officer with a badly smashed knee; and it was no easy matter to attend to the men's injuries by the poor light of one small carefully screened lantern.

About three o'clock, however, the dropping fire ceased and the enemy drew off, followed as the dawn broke by Crawford in charge of the cavalry.

Enjoying a well-earned pipe a few hours later he related to Wynnegate the incidents of the brief pursuit.

"We caught one lot of 'em making for the mountains," he said. "And my fellows speared twenty-one like you'd spear trout. Then I gave the order to dismount and we opened fire. They're plucky devils, for they turned in a flash and made a rush for the led horses. One of the Sowars was wounded—they got him through the upper part of the arm—and two horses were killed. Jove, my men had to scoot back to their beasts and only just got 'em in time. As it was four broke loose and

galloped away. So we had to pick up the left men and ride double."

"Did you get the horses again?"

"Yes, luckily, when we got out of range, and the beggars took to the hills, but they're keen as mustard on the fight, and we're going to have a pretty strenuous time."

"I saw some of your men ride in just now," Wynnegate said. "Ali Dad Khan showed his lance very proudly. It was smeared nearly all the way up."

"Houghton told me it was intended to march on right up the valley and punish 'em by burning every defensible village. Molyneux hopes it could be done in the day, and then we could get back to Chaldara for the attack on the Chaldara Pass which Hitchin is to make—" General Hitchin was in command of the second brigade some twenty miles away. "But I don't believe we shall get off quite so quickly. We shall see." He proved right, for day after day passed and no news came from headquarters and the tribesmen remained unaggressive but watchful. There was a tense feeling in the air, each side waiting for the other's action, and the British troops employed it in strengthening and enlarging their quarters. Parapets grew higher, ditches deeper, traverses were built to protect the defenders from flanking fire, and most important of all—for the mobility of a brigade in such a wild country depends entirely on its pack animals—great mounds and walls of earth reinforced with stone sheltered the horses and mules. Lastly fifty yards away, surrounding the whole camp, was a rope of wire, carefully planned to break a rush.

With these redoubt-like buildings and the level beaten look of the entrance and exit tracks that had once hardly shown, the place began to wear a permanent aspect quite comforting to its inhabitants, for there

seemed every reason to expect that they would be there some time. The wounded—a certain number were injured by the fire that was never wholly absent, night or day—were sent to the base at Mutta, stores and further transport got up, and the mobility of the Brigade once more established.

Meanwhile the torturing heat of the summer began very slowly to wane, and Molyneux awaited orders from India that did not come.

One afternoon when the sky was a dome of glittering blue, and the air quivered above the bare earth, a deputation of tribesmen was seen approaching—a little knot of men clad in white with blue and white turbans, all save their leader who was most gorgeously attired; the political officer Clivedon received them with Molyneux, Houghton, and one or two of the senior officers.

The spokesman, a handsome ruffian with bright eyes and bushy black whiskers, was dressed in a crimson waistcoat with full white linen sleeves, loose baggy trousers of white linen and pointed leather shoes. He was quite a young man and he swaggered into the British General's presence in a manner hardly suitable to his mission, which was to bring in four thousand rupees and fifty rifles as a token of submission.

An orderly picking up one of the piled weapons brought it solemnly to the staff, and Clivedon shook his head.

"This is old and useless," he said, touching the antiquated firearm. "Not such as have been used all these weeks to kill the soldiers of the Sirkar."

The ambassador from the tribesmen bowed and spread out protesting hands.

"Nay, but the Heaven-born forgets that we be poor men with our property at the mercy of the Sirkar ! There be none other."

"There be twenty-two rifles of newest pattern captured from the Sikhs only five days since. Either these rifles must be brought to the Sirkar or the villages of those robbers will be destroyed."

He of the black whiskers began to lose something of his insolent yet subtly attractive swagger.

"Nay, let the most excellent sahib not be angry with his poor slaves. We have not got the rifles. Of a truth they are not in our hands. Did not the robbers from the mountains yonder take them from us when they visited our villages but yesterday?"

"That's probably true," Houghton murmured, and Clivedon agreed; but punishment must be levied, and he inquired of his fierce visitor where the other young men of the tribe were. Whereupon the other admitted quite frankly that they had gone to attack Chaldara once more, but had waited, finding it strongly held.

The naïve admission was most unsatisfactory, and Clivedon's face grew adamant.

"Yet the rifles must be found," he said, and the young chieftain bowed again.

"I will consult the elders of our tribe, most high Excellency," he said at last, evading the direct reply, and departed from the camp, his swagger returning with every step.

"That means a refusal and more trouble," Clivedon said with a shrug, and Molyneux telegraphed for further supports, which were despatched in the shape of two battalions, two squadrons and a battery from India.

Meanwhile his own troops destroyed eight villages in the centre of the valley, the tribesmen unable to contend with the troops in the open sullenly watching from the hillsides and sniping at the cavalry patrols.

But burning villages in the open plain was easy work compared to touching those at the foot of the hills where the ground grew broken and rocky, and the task

of the troops was difficult in the extreme. Everyone was relieved when the battery and two cavalry squadrons arrived a few days in advance of the promised infantry battalions and, as they reached the fort before sundown, everyone off duty turned out to see them come in. It was a perfect evening, and the surrounding hills seemed but a stone's throw away, so clear was the atmosphere, while the sky was of that tender blue that promises a night serene and clear; the colours of rice-fields, chenar foliage and bare rocks were softened in the opalescent light, and far to the south the crest of the Koh-i-Mohr gleamed crimson in the sunset.

Wynnegate, Ruthven and Crawford had strolled from their mess-tent to what was known as the main street of the camp, and, watching the troops' arrival, smoked cigarettes and enjoyed the first faint coolness of the air.

"Mess in twenty minutes with sniping accompaniment," Ruthven remarked. "Well they look a fit lot, don't they, Wynnegate?"

"Very," Wynnegate agreed, "it's time we had some fresh blood. Loss of sleep is telling a bit on some of our men."

"Yes. Come on and have a vermouth. Hullo—someone seems to know you."

Wynnegate looked up sharply. Riding by at a foot's pace was Delphine's brother, Torquil.

They nodded a brief greeting to each other, then Wynnegate strolled off to accept Ruthven's invitation and later to go in to mess, which for a wonder was unusually peaceful, being undisturbed by the snipers who usually harried the camp during the hours of darkness. Later, in the light of a glorious moon, Torquil came over from his own mess, and after a formal greeting on both sides, sat down in the shelter of two mud walls to smoke and talk with the little group of men he knew.

Wynnegate, longing desperately for news of Delphine yet unable to ask, watched Torquil as closely as he could, for the distinct likeness between brother and sister gave him an exquisite pain that he would not have been without. A gesture, a fleeting expression, a turn of the head, and the same brilliant dark eyes, though in the man they were sombre and unhappy—all was Delphine, and Wynnegate was hungry for the sight and touch of her.

He watched, heedless of everything else, quite unconscious of the talk around him till Crawford slapped his knee and made him jump.

“Hullo old thing, come to earth! We’ve been asking your valuable opinion for at least five minutes and you’ve been moongazing.”

Wynnegate did not take the trouble to contradict, but looked round at the others with a smile.

“I’m so sorry,” he apologised. “What was it?”

“Transport—camels, mules, or both?”

“Mules only,” Wynnegate answered unhesitatingly. “He’s faster, he can go over more difficult ground, and he keeps in better condition. Yes, mules all the time.”

“It seems to me the quantity is enormous,” Torquil said. “Of course I’m utterly new to this part of the country and frontier fighting, and I consider myself damned lucky to be here. Everyone seems to be concerned with transport. Why?”

“Because it’s the most important thing of all,” Crawford said. “You see in these valleys wheeled traffic of any sort is absolutely impossible and the cost and the difficulty of supplies is enormous. You see we’re a long way from our base considering the sort of country around, and we’ve got to carry all our food with us as well as ammunition.”

“People talk lightly of moving troops here and there,” Ruthven put in, “and that’s all very well when

you're in a country intersected with railways and excellent roads. Then your supplies can be rushed up at any odd moment. Here you've got the devil's own job to get even footing twice on the same level, with thirty-ton rocks flung about like a child's bricks, piled all around you."

"Yes, I see," Torquil said. "It's difficult country, but it's worth coming to. At least if you of the Frontier Force had a hard time you get excitement too."

"It's the finest fighting force in the world," Wynnegate said, stretching out an arm for the drink that stood close beside him. "You're certainly in luck's way to be sent up, Molyneux."

"Cavalry's the thing here. Wonderful what they've done already," Ruthven remarked, and being an infantry officer, paid a generous tribute to Crawford, who got up to bow mockingly, and was pulled down again by Wynnegate as offering a target in the brilliant moonlight to any far-off sniper.

"Sit down, you bally idiot! The only safe place in this camp is under a wall."

Chapter XII

Not till the next day but one did Wynnegate get a chance to speak again to Torquil, and then it was only with an effort that he was able to ask after Delphine without any trace of his longing appearing in the question. Torquil, in that brief day or two in the Kashmir Valley, had been too full of his own troubles to question his sister very closely about hers, and he had not connected them with Wynnegate. Consequently he saw no embarrassment in the latter's inquiry.

"She's not very fit," he said. "My father seems to think her changed. Says she's lost her vitality—you know her well enough to realise what that means. It's probably nothing. She was always on the heights or in the depths."

"I don't think she wanted to go back to England just then," Wynnegate said, making a bold bid for confidence.

"You're right. She didn't. It was a pity," Torquil agreed. "She liked the life here. It gave her so much interest. I don't wonder. I should hate to go back to London myself."

But Wynnegate wanted to talk of Delphine, and did so recklessly now that he thought Torquil had no suspicion of how matters stood.

"I had the privilege of your sister's friendship," he said. "And I have missed it—more than I could have believed possible to miss anyone's."

Torquil glanced at him.

"Why don't you write?" he suggested.

Wynnegate lit a cigarette with rather elaborate slowness.

"I'm not a good correspondent," he said when the deliberate action was over. "Letters are an unsatisfactory medium at best."

He felt suddenly afraid of his self-control. The memory of Delphine was too painfully intimate to speak of, and as greatly as he had longed to speak, now he longed for silence. Torquil, ready for conversation, however, did not guess the agitation that was disturbing the other.

"It's a wonderful country this," he said. "That's a common-place, but I feel obliged to make it. It's primitive and hard, this frontier of yours, but it offers a man a man's work, and that is all one should ask for. I envy you fellows up here, and I'm keen to stay out and get up to this part of the world for good."

"It's a fine school for self-development," Wynnegate replied. "It teaches self-reliance and it makes a boy act as a man. For instance. British subalterns of twenty or twenty-one are expected to compete on equal terms with Sikhs and Pathans of thirty or so, who have been fighters for years, who have seen active service, and who are in the prime of magnificent manhood. It's a pretty hard competition, and it says a good deal for our breed that it very seldom comes out with a balance on the wrong side."

"It's extraordinary how often you hear cries from certain politicians about our aggression and greed that leads us to regard savage tribesmen fighting for their homes merely as targets for fire. It seems too—in Westminster—to be the act of tyranny, not justice, to burn villages and destroy forts. On the face of it it is. But I can't see what else one can do. All these fellows' houses are loopholed and the villages are fortifications. I suppose we could leave them alone."

"That's not possible because of Afghanistan—even if one discounts Russia. The Amir would make him-

self master of the situation in no time and then there'd be the devil to pay for the Indian Government and for the Punjabis. The Punjab would be overrun with these fellows we're after now, and there'd be robbery and murder everywhere. You see you can't cease to safeguard the Frontier now that it is so near both Russian and Afghan territory—and with the latter you are competing with magnificent fighters used from their childhood to this wild country and this form of fighting."

"And the burning?"

"Well, you see for yourself that if you destroy fortified places you destroy a village. The things are synonymous. I believe some people—and educated people at that—believe the situation to be rather like this: a regular army of tribesmen who are always fighting us or each other, and a peace-loving much-tried agricultural population living in between us and that army. I suppose it's a fairly natural misconception. Hullo! Here's Houghton!"

Colonel Houghton, coming rapidly down the main track through the camp, stopped as he met them.

"Wynnegate, we start at noon to attack and take Gatgai—it lies almost in the hills. You'll be wanted."

"Good. Thanks for giving me notice now. I'll be off and get ready."

He saluted and went off. Torquil went away towards his own quarters, and presently the official orders came to the whole camp and those troops who were to take part began to assemble. They marched out of the camp just at noon, and presently Wynnegate found himself for a few moments alongside Houghton, who pointed out their distant objectives, for another village some little way to the south must also be taken if Gatgai was to be effectually captured.

The ground, running up into the lower hills, was

broken in the extreme, with rocks some forty feet in height flung in wildest confusion over the stony earth, which hardly appeared to afford foothold for anything larger than a goat. Yet here the action must be fought, and, as the cavalry approached, it was evident that resistance was intended. The snipers began their deadly work almost before the advance troops were within range, and before the general firing began two squadrons rode round to the extreme left where the flank would probably be threatened; Crawford at the head of his men, while the remainder of the Kala Ismail Khan detachment, the Guides Infantry and two battalions of British troops formed the centre front of the advance. The Guides led the way at a quick pace across the last stretch of open ground, and one by one men fell as tribesmen fired, with excellent marksmanship and from equally excellent cover.

Wynnegate, longing to take part in the active fighting, watched through his field-glasses the hurrying dust-coloured figures of the Guides, and as they gained the rocks, the hasty withdrawal of the tribesmen who dodged here and there, sometimes reaching cover again, sometimes falling. Meanwhile nearer at hand, the British found themselves facing a severe resistance, and though the battery had come into action and was throwing its shells on to the higher slopes, where the tribesmen were firing with such deadly accuracy, it became evident that this was to be no "walk-over," but a tough piece of work.

Wynnegate riding up, saw the Guides had captured a ridge, but could not leave it as it was an important strategical post and the enemy were waiting to rush it; consequently a gap opened between the Guides and one of the British battalions and the enemy rushed through, at the same moment that another attack was made on the extreme right which succeeded in turning the flank.

Above the village were strongly built sangars, and in them the enemy was in force, and Wynnegate, knowing that Crawford had dismounted and was leading some of his men on foot, longed to be by his side.

Instead, he had far more than he could do where he was, moving from wounded man to wounded man, helping his three orderlies to carry or assist them to the rear and easing the dying as best he could.

Bullets spat up the dust viciously around him, for his tall figure moving swiftly from place to place had attracted unwelcome attention from the enemy's snipers, but he bore a charmed life, and continued his work of mercy, till looking up for a moment, he saw two Sikhs staggering along beneath the burden of an officer who lay heavily in their arms. The helmet had fallen off, the tunic was drenched in blood, and a great sword-cut disfigured the brow and left cheek, but there was no mistaking who it was, and with a sinking heart Gervase hurried to them. Behind a friendly boulder the troopers laid down their burden, and only their stern sense of duty took them from their loved officer's side in his dire extremity. One of them, no less a person than Duffadar Ali Dad Khan, Zyarulla's son, lingered an instant.

“ My sahib . . . he is dead ? ”

Wynnegate kneeling by Crawford's side looked up with dazed eyes.

“ God knows ! ” he said huskily, and the man's stern face quivered. Then he hurried back to the struggle, where all aid was needed.

The battle had passed on and Wynnegate, cutting away the drenched tunic, found as he had known he would a wound that was mortal, for the bullet had entered the body at a vital spot and death was a matter of a few hours at most. He did what he could, had him placed on a stretcher ready for the retreat,

and with heavy heart turned to the next man who needed him, hoping dully that Crawford's merciful unconsciousness would pass without waking into death.

General Molyneux, meanwhile, seeing how strong the pressure was becoming, gave the order for the withdrawal to commence, and, as always, the withdrawal was the severest test of all to the men's courage and nerve; for the enemy harassed the retreating troops, sheltered by their burning village and the great rocks around, though the advancing battery screened the withdrawal to a certain degree by its rapid fire of shrapnel.

The available stretchers and doolies were far too few, and Wynnegate had to see the wounded carried over the terrible ground in the arms of their comrades, jolted, half-dropped at times, and suffering excruciating tortures by such transport.

A splendid Pathan non-commissioned officer with a shattered thigh and arm shot off at the elbow groaned in mortal agony as his two bearers stumbled over the stones, and Wynnegate cursed silently the policy that had denied him his request for more drugs and equipment. If those high officials could see these men with their suffering so cruelly and needlessly intensified would they still insist on financial retrenchment? He had done what was possible with morphia, and now spurred on ahead to be in readiness when they should arrive in camp, passing as he did so a gruesome enough spectacle. A number of mules bearing the bodies of the killed tied upon them, heads dangling one side, feet another, turbans fallen off, the Sikhs noticeable by their long black hair all matted with blood and dust.

Horrible indeed did such treatment seem of the gallant dead, but there was no other way of carrying them off, and to leave their bodies for the enemy to mutilate and defile was unthinkable.

The camp at last ! Wynnegate, with his assistants, soon had everything ready and, outside it, a little to the left, two operating tables were hastily prepared, made of medical store boxes and covered with water-proof sheeting, and there very soon the ground was red with brave blood and the rough stretcher beds full.

Crawford was taken straight into a tent. Nothing could be done for him, and dearly as Gervase longed to be by his side, it was impossible, for other wounded men were still needing his skill.

One of the last to be brought in was Torquil with a badly injured knee and in great pain. The injury was severe, and there was a question of amputation; but the latter was not absolutely essential, and both Gervase and the brilliant Hindu surgeon, trained in Sir Pertab Singh's hospital, decided to save the limb if possible; so he was carried into shelter, the wound dressed and tended, and General Molyneux informed of his nephew's condition. He came over to see him as soon as possible, but Torquil was asleep, having been given morphia, and he left the tent agreeing with the two professional men in their decision not to amputate unless absolutely necessary. The sick and wounded were to be taken to Mutta without delay, proper transport being sent to the camp for them, for the campaign was not yet ended, and to keep them at the fort would hamper the brigade too seriously. It was possible that X-rays would save Torquil's leg, and knowing there was an apparatus at Peshawur, Gervase wired for it to be sent to Mutta. That done he had some much needed food and went again to Crawford. He found Ruthven there, standing by the narrow stretcher bed with grim face and clenched hands, Ruthven turning as Wynnegate came up to him.

“ Will he come round—before ? ” he said, with an

instinctive lowering of the voice in the presence of death.

Wynnegate bent down. "I hope not," he said.

"You mean he'll suffer?"

"Yes. Please God, this'll pass into coma."

"Please God then," the other echoed gruffly, and a spasm of pain passed over his face. He and Crawford had been friends.

"Are you going to stay?" he asked after a moment.

"If I can, but I expect I shall be wanted before long. Ah! I thought so. Send me word if there's any change."

An orderly came hurrying up to summon him to another death-bed, and he went away leaving Ruthven to mount guard. The latter was still there when he returned an hour later, but directly he looked at Crawford he saw there was a change. The lines were smoothed out of the face, the tenseness of the mouth had relaxed, the breathing was shallow and so low as to be barely noticeable.

Dropping on his knees he laid his fingers on the wrist and waited for the last change. It came swiftly, yet in the peace he had prayed for. Ruthven could not tell when that faint breathing stopped, but Wynnegate knew and gently put the hand back on the bed.

The other man saw the action.

"Is it—" he broke off, and Wynnegate tried to speak, nodded, and dropped his head down for a moment on the pillow beside the bed, his arm outflung as if in caress across Crawford's still form. Only for a moment though, for even as Ruthven laid a hand on his shoulder he lifted his head, pressed his hands hard against his eyes for an instant, then got to his feet.

Ruthven bent down and touched the dark hair with a tenderness of farewell strange to see in such a harsh

man, then held out his hand to Wynnegate, who wrung it hard.

"I'll stay a bit," he said curtly, and Wynnegate nodded.

"Do," he said. "I must go. I'm wanted." And with one last look at the dead face of the man who for twelve years had been his friend he turned away.

Chapter XIII

THERE came one November morning a cablegram to Hugh Molyneux, brief as such messages are, announcing that his son was severely wounded, followed by another from Marguerite asking if it were possible for Delphine to come out to him at Peshawur. They hoped and expected all would go well, and the one person Torquil seemed to want was Delphine. Could she not consider coming out to him ?

Delphine just then was in bed with a severe attack of influenza, but Molyneux had cabled an affirmative reply to Mrs. Howard's suggestion on the arrival of her first cable without saying anything to his daughter. He broke the news to her when she was convalescent with his customary abruptness, and Delphine found herself with nothing to say. One fact leapt to prominence in her thoughts as she listened to her father. She should see Wynnegate once again, and the joy of that outweighed everything else.

She knew herself foolish and weak, tried to spurn her gladness with the memory of her father's disclosure, the disclosure that two years ago had seared her soul; and found it useless. Later she would pull herself together, and those words would weigh with her, but just now she could only realise that she would see the man she loved whose face she had never expected to behold again.

A letter arrived later from Marguerite, but not till Delphine had started, saying that Torquil was in hospital in Peshawur, and giving news of the disaster. It seemed that he had been shot in the thigh during a sudden night attack on the occupation of the slopes

of the hills above Agra Fort. Torquil's leg was terribly shattered, for the bullet had splintered the thigh, and the haemorrhage had been so severe that twice his life was despaired of. It had been amputated half-way up the thigh the day she was writing.

It was decided that Delphine should go to Peshawur, where Marguerite Howard had taken a bungalow for the time being, and stay there with her aunt till Torquil was fit for the voyage home, and eagerly she got ready for her journey. Just before she sailed two things happened. The first was a question in the House raised certainly by a Radical member, but creating a pretty stir in all circles. It had, apparently, come to the honourable member's knowledge that the campaign in the Chota Valley had been an exceedingly expensive one to life and limb. The Indian troops had not been nearly as well armed as the Afghans and rebel tribesmen, and the death-roll had been seriously increased by want of adequate medical and surgical attention.

No doubt such circumstances were not alone to be found on this particular occasion; but in other Frontier campaigns they had been, perhaps, more decently hidden. Be that as it may, the Radical member's statement caused a great deal of scandal and enough serious disturbance for the matter to be looked into. The second thing that happened was the meeting between Delphine and Princess Wanda Tonelli.

In October Signor Tonelli died—of dissipation, so the uncharitable said—and Molyneux suddenly returned to town from his sister-in-law's Sussex house, presumably on purpose to call upon the widow. Delphine had never met Princess Tonelli, and she was therefore considerably surprised to be told just before she sailed on December 14th that the former was coming to dine.

"It is not a dinner party, you understand," her father said. "Ask some other man—not a young

idiot—to make a fourth, but nobody else. Princess Wanda is in mourning, and she will wish it to be very quiet."

So, her thoughts racing away towards India, Delphine carried out her father's wishes, invited a young politician, Anthony Cleather, whom he liked, and descended to the drawing-room, a trifle puzzled over the event.

Cleather, detained in the House, was a little late, but Princess Wanda arrived a few minutes before eight to satisfy Delphine's very lively curiosity; for Hugh Molyneux was evidently disturbed in some way by her coming.

He was in the drawing-room early, which was most unusual, and wandered rather restlessly about it, glancing at books and papers, fidgeting with everything he laid hands on and behaving in a manner most unlike himself.

When a carriage was heard to stop outside Delphine glanced at him and saw he was white and rigid, and with a sense of self-reproach, feeling she had observed what was not meant for her eyes, she turned away just as Princess Wanda Tonelli was announced.

She rose to welcome her, but Molyneux forestalled her; striding forward he held out his hands.

"At last!" he said, and there was a sound in his voice Delphine had never before heard. "Wanda! at last!"

Delphine standing by the fire could not see her father's face, for his back was towards her, but she could see the Princess's, and it was white and radiant as though some inward fire of the spirit flashed its light through the body's envelope, and her eyes shone like stars. Delphine heard her father's name: "Hugh! Hugh!" in a voice that thrilled every nerve; then she abruptly turned her eyes away. This was not a meeting which any spectator could watch.

It seemed hours to her startled senses before she heard her name, and turning, found her father at her elbow, the Princess at his side.

"Wanda," he said, "this is Delphine."

As Delphine met those star-like eyes an indescribable sensation seized her; she saw Princess Wanda was smiling and dimly she recognised her extraordinary beauty, but her whole being was in a whirl of confusion, and her greeting the briefest possible.

She realised that both her father and his guest must observe how odd was her behaviour, yet both of them were smiling, and as she looked at her father's face its expression amazed her. The cynicism and hardness were wiped out as if they had never been, the cold eyes were burning, the face was the face of a man in the pride of manhood alight with joy.

Mr. Cleather's arrival put an end to a situation which was intolerable although so brief, and as they went down to dinner, Delphine was thankful for his presence and easy conversation. Her world was for the moment upside down. At dinner the presence of another person forbade intimacy, and Sir Hugh was as ever an excellent host, and Princess Wanda proved herself a delightful guest and amusing talker.

Delphine, who usually was seldom silent, was so quiet that Cleather would have been bored but for the Princess, who exerted herself to talk her best—and that was a very good best indeed.

When Delphine rose she was conscious once again of that indefinable sensation—whether of trepidation or excitement she did not quite know, but both seemed unfounded enough and she made an effort to pull herself together and be sensible.

When the maid had brought coffee and left them together, Princess Wanda was the first to speak.

"I have not seen you since you were very, very

small," she said, and as she spoke Delphine, whose nerves were now calm, saw that, despite her radiant beauty, she had the look of a woman who had known tragedy.

" You were only a baby. And yet—I believe I should have known you."

" You have known my father so long? I had not realised that."

" I have known him—twenty-nine years."

" Twenty-nine years?" Delphine echoed, amazement in voice and face. " But he has never—I mean—"

" You are surprised that we have never met, you and I? There was reason. I have been very little in England. And now—you go away?"

At the first words Delphine had believed she was to hear that reason—and was convinced it was worth hearing, so strangely tender was the tone; then abruptly the Princess had seemed to change her mind and had spoken of the journey before her young hostess. Delphine was conscious of an extraordinary sense of disappointment. Her curiosity was roused, and with it something much deeper, though she did not know what it was. One thing she was sure of—her father and Princess Wanda were in love with one another, and that was surely happiness enough. Yet, unreasoning and absurd as it was, the feeling of disappointment deepened, and as if the Princess knew it, she spoke.

" You will not stay very long away? I want to make your acquaintance—I have waited so many years."

" Only till my brother is fit to travel. I shall bring him home then. You are going to stay in England now?"

" Yes—till the spring. I always go to Venice in the spring. This year I hope—"

Again she stopped, yet there was no confusion in her manner; it was rather as though she withheld a co

fidence she longed to give, and with sudden impulsiveness she leant forward and laid one slim hand on Delphine's.

" You are all I hoped you would be," she said, and her voice thrilled with sudden passion. " I thought much of you when you were little—your future, your personality, interested me. I want us to know one another. To become really friends. Yet there are difficulties still, and I cannot tell them to you."

The lovely face with its great brown eyes was very near Delphine's, the hand with the single magnificent sapphire rested lightly, yet with meaning, on her arm—and the girl oddly off her balance this evening asked a wholly amazing question, asked it abruptly, as if it were forced from her.

" Are you going to marry my father ?" she said.

Before the words had left her lips she realised their enormity, and the scarlet rushed up in her face.

" Forgive me !" she exclaimed. " My question was unpardonable ! I—I do not know what is the matter with me this evening—I am utterly confused and unlike myself. Please, please forgive me, if you can and believe I did not mean to be offensive."

She was trembling with shame and from throat to brow the crimson blood throbbed painfully. What in the world had happened that she should behave in such a manner, should so insult a guest ?

For the moment she could not face Princess Wanda, and when she did so she could only throw out her hands with an unconscious little gesture of appeal.

The Princess had risen and was standing by the fire, one hand rested on the edge of the mantelpiece, the other was clenching and unclenching on her tiny lace handkerchief. When the silence grew unbearable Delphine rose to her feet and went to her side.

" Forgive me !" she said again, and with an effort

raised her eyes—and what she saw was the face of a girl irradiated with the heart of a woman, a face exquisite in feature made more exquisite by the soul within. Princess Wanda stretched out her hand.

"Yes," she said, and Delphine put hers in it, her horrified remorse vanishing.

"Oh!" she said, and her voice shook. "I am glad—glad. Make him happy—he has suffered so."

The next instant the elder woman's arms were round her, she felt herself held closely for a brief moment, held and kissed on either cheek; then, as suddenly, the Princess released her and laughed a trifle unsteadily.

"Oh, if you are mad to-night so am I!" she said. "Of course I forgive you! Unless you were blind and deaf you could not expect anything else after the way we behaved at meeting . . . and I have worn a mask so long I can wear it no longer. I do not care if the whole world guesses—I only know that I love him with all my soul."

The passion in her voice found a willing echo in the girl's heart. Impulsively she spoke.

"It is the best news I have ever had!" she said. "Somehow when you entered here—before you spoke even—when I saw my father's face, I knew. Oh, I am glad! glad!"

"That is all I wished to know," Princess Wanda said very softly, and at that moment the men came in and there was no more personal conversation, and Princess Wanda's intimate manner changed, growing subtly more remote, and though to both Sir Hugh and his daughter it was as sweet and gracious as it had been all the evening, there was a dignity, almost a reserve about her—she was a charming woman, but she was also a very great lady, and Delphine watched her and felt a great pride and joy in her secret knowledge.

It was a short evening, for just before eleven the Princess made her adieux, stretching out the hand with the great sapphire on the middle finger for Cleather and Sir Hugh to kiss. But as she passed Delphine she bent forward and kissed her cheek.

“*Ma chérie!*” she said very softly and passed out of the room, her host following.

Delphine waited half unconsciously till she heard the clatter of hoofs without as the horses moved, and then exerted herself to listen to Cleather, who was longing to talk of the Bill he was hoping to get through.

Later, when she found herself alone with her father, she went up to him and held out her hand.

“ May I wish you very great happiness ?” she said.
“ The Princess honoured me by her confidence.”

He started, not expecting that she had even guessed, frowned, half drew back, then changing his mind, took her hands in his.

“ You are glad ?”

“ Very ! Did you imagine I should not be ? I am amazed, confused. I had no idea—but I am glad beyond words. She is exquisite.”

His fingers tightened on hers till she winced.

“ Your gladness means more to me than you can guess,” he said. “ One day I will explain why this has come so suddenly to your knowledge. Thank you, dear, for what you have said. Now as you have so early a start, I should advise you to go to bed. I hope you will not find it necessary to stay away many weeks. I—we—shall need you.”

Delphine had one question, however.

“ When—when is it ?” she said. “ Not while I am away ?”

“ No. Directly you return. In the early spring; then we go to Venice.”

"To the Princess's palazzo?"

"Yes. So return quickly."

Delphine bent her head in acquiescence, but her heart sank a little; she had not given very much thought to the fact that she must return.

"Yes," she said. "I will come back quickly. Good-night."

Chapter XIV

THE base at Mutta was only twelve miles from Peshawur and after a week's delay the wounded were taken back into the Punjab, much to the relief of Wynnegate and his Hindu colleague, for Mutta was as unsuitable as a place could well be for effective nursing.

It was an instructive sidelight on the condition of medical affairs that the X-ray apparatus which Wynnegate had telegraphed for should be out of order, necessitating the sending of another from Lahore, and when finally Torquil was established in a room in the Peshawur hospital, it had not arrived.

The delay was serious, for the wound showed symptoms neither surgeon liked, but for the moment nothing could be done unless the limb was amputated, and as the apparatus was due to arrive at any hour, they thought it wiser to wait. Marguerite Howard had come from Kala Ismail Khan directly she received news of her nephew's injury and found him looking worn and very ill. So ill that on top of her cable to her brother she took a friend's bungalow and established herself in it.

Meanwhile Wynnegate was fuming at the delay with regard to the X-ray apparatus, and when at length it arrived it was too late. The symptoms which neither he nor Dr. Chanadra Das had liked had developed alarmingly, and a fortnight after Torquil had been brought to Peshawur it was decided to operate.

Marguerite spent the hour writing the letter that was to give her brother the latest news, and Wynnegate came round to her bungalow as soon as he could leave his patient to inform her that the operation was over and that Torquil had stood it remarkably well.

"I wish it had been done before," he said, as Marguerite passed him some tea. "It would have saved him pain and suspense. If only the X-rays could have been used at once—the delay has cost him his leg, poor old chap."

"It's damnable!" Marguerite said in heartfelt acquiescence. "Officialdom again. Oh, I wish you could do something to make them realise at home what such meanness of outlook causes! Poor Torquil—poor dear boy. And he was so keen on his work, so loving India. It's horrible."

"A valuable life thrown away to all intents and purposes," Wynnegate said. "He won't be fit for much for a long while. He'd better get home when he can. India will be no place for him."

Marguerite nodded, but for a moment she did not speak. She was thinking of that farewell that she had witnessed two years ago when Delphine had left Kala Ismail Khan, and was wondering over it now as she had wondered often enough before. Still, he had to know, and how he took the news was his own affair.

"I've some good news for him at all events, when he's well enough to receive it," she said. "I cabled my brother and I have received his answer. As a matter of fact I received it ten days ago. My niece, Delphine—is on her way out."

"What?"

The question came sharply as a pistol-shot, and she had the satisfaction of knowing she had thoroughly startled him.

"Delphine is on her way out," she repeated. "She will stay with me—here—till he is well enough for the voyage home."

Wynnegate, realising that he had betrayed himself, was silent and Marguerite went on.

"I cabled for her when Torquil seemed so ill, and I

expect her to arrive early next week. It will be delightful for me to have her."

As she paused seeming to expect an answer, Wynnegate strove to reply casually.

"It will be quite strange to see her again," he said. "It is two years, isn't it, since she went?"

"Yes. What! Are you off so soon?" For he had risen.

"I'm afraid I must go," he said. "I want to get back to the hospital. Good-bye, Mrs. Howard. I'll let you know all details with regard to Molyneux."

She bid him good-bye, and he walked away like a man in a dream, along the broad tree-shaded road that led from Marguerite Howard's bungalow to the hospital, trying to realise what she had told him.

The Punjab cold weather is a joyful thing, the air fresh and sparkling like wine with a clear azure sky and brilliant sun that at midday is delightful and gives way to sharp touches of frost at night and morning.

The bungalows of the cantonment well away towards the mountains from the actual city itself, stand pleasantly among gardens fragrant but a month or two later with roses, along broad well-kept roads shaded with trees and intersected here and there with little water-courses, and in the early spring the smell of violets is everywhere, for violets and roses flourish in abundance, and along the Mall with its grass and palms and sycamores a February day is exquisite.

How Wynnegate got through those intervening days between Torquil's operation and Delphine's coming he did not quite know. There was, luckily, far too much for him to do to enable him to sit down and think about it, but even so thought could not quite be banished, and at night when he lay in bed staring into the darkness he went over and over the problem before him. When at last the day came he was looking worn and ill with sheer

anxiety, was sleeping hardly at all and eating less, his every nerve strained to breaking point for the meeting that was so soon to come.

He saw her first the next afternoon, for she came unexpectedly enough to the hospital.

He was in his own little den there which had been put at his disposal by the resident doctor, a tiny place half-laboratory, half-sitting-room, leading off the entrance hall, and he was looking over a case of instruments when he became aware of footsteps suddenly ceasing, and looking up, he saw her standing in the doorway.

Slowly he rose to his feet, never taking his eyes from her face, and all his strength and resolution went from him. Fate had thrown them together; he could fight no more.

It was the girl who spoke first.

"Gervase," she said, "aren't you going to speak to me?"

The sound of her dear voice unloosed the spell that held him motionless, and with a stifled sound in his throat, he took one stride towards her and caught her in his arms.

"Delphine!" he said unsteadily. "Oh, my dear! my dear!"

Chapter XV

“I MUST talk to you—there is so much I want to say,” she said when flushed and trembling she drew back from him. “No, don’t touch me again, dear. I’m not strong enough—it’s all impossible, though it’s just heaven.”

“Impossible?” Regardless of her words, he held her hands closely. “What d’you mean?”

“This—you and me,” she said, and though her voice shook her eyes were steady. “Quite impossible. You know it too—ah, we can’t discuss such things now and here. I came to see Torquil, and the hospital orderly brought me to you.”

“I know. I am not going to let you go again,” he said. “There is nothing impossible—but you shall have all the time I’ve got. I’ll take you to Torquil now, and then come back to the bungalow with you. Mrs. Howard will let me see you alone.”

“Very well. And now Torquil. I don’t feel very much like myself, but perhaps he won’t notice I am different.”

She looked up at him with a little smile.

“Do I look—disturbed?”

“A little,” he was obliged to admit. “You also look adorable, my dearest. That is all I can realise.”

She opened her lips to speak, but checked herself; such words were very sweet to her, and she had starved her heart long enough. Just for a few hours she would let herself be weak, denying herself no longer of what others might have in abundance. With shining eyes and cheeks flushed faintly carmine she walked

beside him along the stone passage to the room where her brother lay.

"You must be prepared to see him look very different," Gervase said, pausing a moment and lowering his voice. "The pain and the shock have pulled him down severely."

"I am prepared," she said, and together they entered the room.

Torquil lay with closed eyes in the low iron bedstead facing the door, and during the instant that Delphine observed him before he raised his lids and looked at her, she was indeed horrified to see how ill and worn he appeared. Always pale, now he was ghastly, with deep lines about the mouth and eyes, lips set in a hard line beneath the narrow black moustache, purple shadows under the eyes themselves. He looked years older than the brother she remembered, and Delphine felt the unaccustomed tears start to her eyes. Turning quickly to the bed she dropped on her knees beside it.

"Torquil—dear, I've come," she said, and kissed the haggard face so close to her.

He had never been demonstrative, but now his arms went round her and held her close for a long moment; and when he released her they were alone.

"Delphine, how good to see you!" he said. "How good! And you'll stay?"

"Yes, dear, till you are fit to go home with me."

His lips compressed themselves at the mention of home; he was silent a moment, then he gave a bitter little laugh.

"Yes, it's England after all," he said. "All my fine ideas of Frontier service dashed. I shall have to be content with hopping about the clubs on crutches—damn my luck! What's the good of living that sort of life?"

Delphine seated herself on a chair drawn close.

"Torquil, don't be an idiot!" she said, more bracing than sympathetic, as she judged such a course wiser. "As if you'd ever be content to live a club life! I grant it is damned hard luck . . . but there's a good deal left to you yet, even if you have only got one leg! If you could only enter political life and knock some of the officialdom out of headquarters you'd have done a greater service to the Empire than ever you could out here fighting. Dear,"—remorse lest she had been hard seized her suddenly—"oh, don't think I don't care, don't understand. I do. I'd gladly give my own health to you if you could only get fit and whole again. But it's the future, not the past, and I want you to do fine work."

At her enthusiasm a faint smile crossed his face.

"I know," he said, and stretching out his hand, laid it on hers. "You mean I'm whining. I admit it. I admit also that you make me ashamed of so doing. Now if you don't mind we'll leave my very uninteresting carcase alone and discuss other matters. How is everyone?"

"Father? Well. And oh, I've news for you—strange, but welcome news. Did you ever meet Princess Wanda Tonelli?"

"Wife of the Second Secretary at the Italian Embassy? Yes, I remember. She was a Pole, wasn't she? Very lovely."

"Yes, and charming."

"Yes. I met her a good deal some years ago. Then they went out of England. He was an impossible blighter, though."

"Did you know that she and father were very old friends?"

"No. Were they? Hadn't any idea they'd ever met. Why?"

"Because I've surprising—and interesting—news

for you," she said. "If you're not too tired I'll tell you."

"Tired? I'm not tired, only deadly dull. It'll do me a world of good to hear some news. What is it? Have a cigarette—they're on that table—and tell me."

She helped herself, settled more comfortably in her chair, and began the story of that amazing last evening in London, a story that he heard with the greatest interest although he said nothing till the end. Then he nodded.

"I'm very glad," he said. "He's had a very tragic life and deserves some happiness."

For awhile he lay silent, thinking over the affair, then suddenly glanced at Delphine in some perplexity.

"Why in the world didn't he marry her instead of—our mother? If she's known him so long."

"Not long enough for that. You are thirty-two, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Twenty-eight years was the time she mentioned. They have known each other twenty-eight years. You see their meeting was after his marriage. I wonder if he fell in love with her?"

"Most probably," Torquil said drily. "I do not think his wife was the type of woman to keep a man faithful. If I had had the bad luck to marry such a one I should have left her."

"I admit the suspicion crossed my mind," Delphine said. "Right or wrong, I cannot condemn him if so—and they met as lovers. I'm curious to know, and I never shall, for the Princess is not the woman of whom to ask impertinent personal questions."

They discussed the affair a while longer, both deeply interested in it, then the chick lifted and Marguerite entered, followed by Gervase.

"Dear, you've talked quite long enough," she said.

"Torquil, Captain Wynnegate has been telling me that you can soon be moved to my bungalow. Good, isn't it? I'm going to give you your tea, while Delphine goes home and rests. She's still rather tired, and you'll have plenty of time now to discuss everything in heaven and earth in the next week or two. Captain Wynnegate, you'll see Delphine home, won't you?"

He did not answer in words, but his look and the movement he made towards her was sufficient.

Marguerite turned to her nephew, and Delphine accompanied Gervase out of the room.

"Mrs. Howard tells me you walked up," he said. "You've still your English habits. Now, dearest, shall we go straight back? She suggested it. Then we can have an uninterrupted hour or two as Desmond won't be in."

Desmond had been given a month's sick leave after his wound, and was now at the bungalow, as his mother could not be there alone.

"Ah, that's what I want!" she said. "You can spare the time?"

"Yes, I had a lucky touch of fever ten days ago that has put me officially on the sick list, though I'm perfectly fit again, and am, as you see, on hospital duty."

She looked at him anxiously as they passed out of the hospital.

"Ought you to be working?" she asked, trying to keep the anxiety out of her voice.

He glanced down at her.

"Why, yes, I am perfectly all right again and it's impossible to have nothing to do. Delphine, I told Mrs. Howard."

"Gervase!" Delphine checked her step to look at him in dismay. "Oh—why did you do that?"

"So that you couldn't change your mind, my dearest, and say you wouldn't marry me after all."

"But, Gervase, I did not say I would marry you. I can't—I will not. You know why as well as I do. Oh!" Sudden pained impatience sounded in her voice. "We can't talk of things like that here in the roads. I didn't want to talk of it either just now. I wanted just to be happy for one day."

The quiver in her voice thrilled Gervase painfully; regardless of gossips he slipped his hand through her arm and drew her on gently enough.

"Dearest, you *shall* be happy," he said very low, "and I beg your pardon for worrying you. We won't talk of the future, but just of the present that belongs to us. Will you give me some tea when we get back?"

She pressed his hand close to her side.

"Of course I will, and I am a little overstrained, I think, or I should not be so stupid. You didn't worry me. Oh, how difficult it is *not* to talk of things, isn't it? But we won't. We'll just talk of ourselves. And there are so many things I want to hear, so much I want to tell you."

They walked back slowly, passing all manner of vehicles on their way—dogcarts, dandies, flat country-carts drawn by gentle slow-moving bullocks, carriages containing the wealth and position of the cantonment, and tongas rattling amidst the lighter European equipages.

The roads in the winter and early spring are veritable avenues in Peshawur, and to Delphine, who had never been to the city before, the walk home would have been enjoyable even if she had been alone. Now, with the man she loved by her side, it was very nearly heaven.

The broad well-kept road was fringed on either side by a luxurious growth of close-grown holly, bangan, and casuarina overhanging the low whitewashed walls of the compounds. Within those walls, shaded by heavy trees, were lawns of coarse grass, surrounded by

massed bushes of roses, roses of every hue and scent that would presently turn the cantonment into a fragrant paradise.

It was too early for the roses as yet, but the exquisite scent of violets already vied with that of starry jasmine, and bougainvillea and scarlet hibiscus made patches of rich colour against the green.

As they reached Marguerite's bungalow, Gervase paused.

"That is the Khyber road," he said, indicating the grey enamelled track that they were crossing. "The Pass is over there, but you can't see it—only the snow on the mountains. To-morrow the road is open. It's Friday, you see. Would you like to go through?"

"I adore it! D'you mean you can fix it for me, Gervase?"

"I think so," he said, smiling at her eagerness. "What a darling child you are still, Delphine! You look about twelve when something pleases you unexpectedly. How have you managed to keep your enthusiasms, I wonder?"

"They were all I had to keep," she said simply. "My illusions died so early."

He did not answer except to tighten his grasp of her arm, and when they had entered the cool mauve-and-white drawing-room of the bungalow which had been lent to Marguerite, he took her close into his arms and held her.

"Oh, my dearest, my dearest!" he whispered, his voice shaking. "You shall be happy, indeed you shall! God helping us, I'll make you forget everything that ever has hurt you."

She too felt the uselessness of fighting; and with a little sigh of content let herself rest against him. She would not think of the past or the future. The present was here in its rapture. It was enough.

Presently they had tea, Gervase watching her every movement, hardly able to believe she was really there, and after a while she told him of her father's expected marriage with Princess Wanda Tonelli, and at the mention of her name he sat up suddenly, the delicious idleness gone from mind and body.

"Princess Wanda Tonelli!" he said. "Why, I know her. I mean I knew her when I was in England. She was a patient of mine—and a friend."

There was gravity in his voice, for the prospect of Sir Hugh Molyneux's marriage with Princess Wanda complicated matters rather curiously. Princess Wanda had accorded him the honour of her friendship, and her friendship had been no idle thing, but a very charming and precious possession in those years of brilliance in London. Afterwards, in those days of emptiness when all the accustomed anchorage had failed, when the very foundations of life and habit were shaken, that friendship had been more precious still, and her letters, coming two or three times a year, had been something to look forward to and treasure. To her, suppressing names, he had told the truth when he first made up his mind to leave England before Molyneux should force him to do so, and she had stood by him loyally. To her he had been ill-used by Fate, and the utmost she accused him of was a certain un-wisdom in not refusing definitely and at once to attend Mrs. Molyneux. Those letters, dated from Paris, Rome, or her villa in the Sabines, rarely from London, had kept him in touch with the world he had left; and in view of his present knowledge it seemed to him strange that she had never mentioned Molyneux. The temptation to tell Delphine the whole story seized him, but he put it aside knowing it impossible. He could not blacken her mother to Delphine, and his story could not be told without doing so. Had the relation

been different he could have spoken, for Delphine was not a young girl, and he could not speak to her with absolute frankness, but, as it was, it was not to be thought of. Suddenly realising the length of his silence, he looked up with a start and a smiling apology.

Delphine, however, read more than a mere wool-gathering into the pause that had followed his words.

"Dear, that is strange—and may be very useful. I mean—" She checked herself suddenly. "It might have been if—if the future had been different for either of us. I'll tell you some other time what I mean. Not now. The fact of the marriage remains, and she is charming and gracious, and already I feel strangely drawn towards her. There seems to be some sympathy between us—and I am not apt to give my affection very readily. But that is enough of my feelings. There's another thing I wanted to talk about. It's Torquil. How is he really? What is your opinion of him? He looks shockingly ill."

"He has nearly died, and a man cannot suffer as he has suffered without showing it very plainly. He is still in a precarious state as regards the wound. It's not healing as I should like. The amputation should have been done before, yet it was not wise. We hoped to save the leg, and if the X-ray apparatus here had been in working order we could probably have done so. That's the bitterest blow of the whole thing."

Delphine nodded.

"I gathered so from what Marguerite told me. It makes me hate the very word official. My poor Torquil! And he was beginning to be so happy in India. He wrote me a short letter just as he was starting on the Chota Valley campaign, and in it he said how lucky he was to be ordered up. His heart was set on the active life he would have lived out here

—and now it is all over. I tried to cheer him this afternoon, but I don't feel very cheerful for him."

"He has plenty of grit," Gervase said. "But he doesn't seem to have any great desire for life. It's that that adds to my anxiety about him. His curious inertia."

"Do you wonder?" Delphine asked, looking at him with sudden significance. "What is there for him? He can't marry. He has always a sword of Damocles suspended over his head, and an active life—the one thing to keep him from brooding upon it—is denied him."

Gervase was silent. Her reference to the doom that might lie in wait for Torquil had recalled to his mind the battle that was in store between them. He knew well enough that she had determined not to marry him, and he, for his part, had determined that she should. He knew, too, the arguments she would advance, and legitimate, wholly admirable reasons, and proposed to meet them with nothing more formidable than his reiterated love for her.

Which would be the victor he had not the slightest idea. The only certain thing was that the time for the struggle was not yet.

Marguerite's return interrupted their talk, and soon after he had to take his leave, for work called imperatively, and it was with a spirit filled with gratitude that he left the bungalow and made his way back to the hospital.

Chapter XVI

As the days went by and he still remained in hospital, Torquil's condition gave his friends increasing anxiety; the wound refused to heal, and there were other symptoms that increased Wynnegate's uneasiness. As yet he did not wish to disturb Delphine, but when she had been in Peshawur nearly a fortnight he came away from Torquil's bedside with the knowledge in his heart that he must not conceal from her any longer the gravity of her brother's condition.

Shrinking from the blow he must deal the woman he loved, he saw Marguerite first and broke the news to her that Torquil was going backward not forward, and Marguerite, listening in shocked silence, realised how he dreaded telling Delphine. Yet no one else must do it; whatever she had to bear—she would bear it better if she heard it from the lips of the man she loved—for Marguerite, like her niece, had deliberately put the issue of the question away from her and was living in the present.

“Do you think you must tell Delphine at once?” she said at last.

“Not later than to-morrow. I want her to enjoy the dance to-night. I'm trying something new to-night, and I'll see what effect it has first. It's the fourth day of the treatment, and I shall know then exactly what to do. I'm dining with you to-night, am I not?”

“You are. It's to be quite quiet, only three other people. You're off now?”

“Yes, I've an operation at five. Don't say anything yet. I'll be back at eight.”

Had it not been for his great anxiety dinner would have been a pleasant time, for the three other guests were all congenial and interesting people, and Marguerite was a charming hostess. Even so, anxiety could not wholly stifle the happiness that lay so deep in his heart, a happiness that sent a glow through all his being when his eyes met Delphine's across the table.

Delphine, clad in one of the rather rich colours she affected, was a vision of Florentine effect in a frock of deep golden-orange, and was at her best; that air of intense vitality that had been for so long absent once more investing her whole personality with its charm.

After dinner she was going on to a dance, and Gervase, putting his anxiety aside, gave himself up to the pleasure of the evening, for he was a beautiful dancer, and such pleasures had been rare of late years.

The big room with its flowers and decorations, the gay crowd of people, the excellent floor and the presence of Wynnegate all conspired to make the hours a dream of delight to Delphine, and when at last Wynnegate claimed her for the supper-dance and the waltz following her cup of joy was full.

Supper over, he suggested the gardens, and with a cloak wrapped round her bare shoulders they went out into the starlight that is such a reality in northern India.

It was a wonderful night, fresh without being cold, the air sparkling with vitality from the snows and fragrant with the scent of jessamine—a night strangely different from those Delphine had known in Kala Ismail Khan.

For a few moments they wandered up and down the paths not talking very much, then the memory of a remark of Delphine's recurred to Wynnegate's mind, and he spoke of it.

"Dearest, that first day, you told me that Princess Wanda's friendship might be a very useful thing in certain circumstances. What did you mean? Will you tell me now?"

For several days that same memory had been haunting Delphine, and now that he spoke of it her mind was made up. With a little gesture she indicated a seat, close to the verandah and the brightly-lit rooms, yet just far enough to be out of earshot.

"Yes, dear," she said, "I've been wanting to, so I'm glad you ask me. Let us sit down. It's rather a strange thing I want to talk of."

He sat down at once, warned by the gravity of her tone, but even so, he was hardly prepared for the words she spoke next.

"It concerns the reason that forced you to give up your London practice," she said quietly. "The reason my father gave. I should like to tell you exactly what he told me, although I know that you know it all already. May I?"

"Please do," he said very low, and she began to speak, recounting the history of that evening two years ago, when she had first returned from India.

He listened without interruption, his face white and stern. When at last she ended he spoke harshly.

"Is this the reason why you refuse to marry me? Do you believe, as your father believed, that I was in love with your mother?"

Her exclamation, sharp with pain, recalled him to himself; catching her hands in his with remorse as swift as his bitterness, he drew her close beside him.

"My darling, forgive me, forgive me! I was a brute to say such a thing."

Her love was too generous to harbour resentment, and she knew him too well not to understand that he had spoken out of intolerable pain.

"I know you did not mean that," she said, her hands on his shoulders. "It was not you that said it."

"Indeed, it was not. It was some wretched bitter devil in me that made me insult you so. Delphine, darling, you know me well enough to trust me. I want you to listen to what I am going to tell you now. I did not mean ever to speak of it, and even now it seems a damnable thing—yet I can't see what else I can do. Your dear love for me, your generous trust, demands that I should tell you the truth—and while you listen, remember that your mother was not even then a responsible human being."

She moved a little, laying her hand across his knee and clasping her fingers over his.

"I am listening, dearest," she said. "Tell me what happened."

He told her then, sparing himself nothing, dwelling even with too much insistence on his young conceit and ambition, told her from the first moment of his meeting with Enid Molyneux to the last, of his doubt of Molyneux's course of action, of the waiting for the scandal the latter determined to bring. Of the final scene between them, when Molyneux made the price of his silence that of Wynnegate's leaving England. He told her of his journey to India, of his honorary appointment as surgeon to the Frontier Force in the Kala Ismail Khan district, with honorary rank as captain; of Crawford's friendship, and Princess Wanda's letters and unfailing belief in his integrity. Lastly, of his hopes and fears when he learned of her own coming, and the developments that followed it.

It was a long story, and it was not easy to tell. An indignant partner, who came to claim Delphine, was besought to wait till she could excuse her neglect and to tell any others that for a while she could not keep her promises, and so, under the white fire of the stars, she

listened to Wynnegate's tragedy. She made no immediate comment when he ended, but her fingers tightened on his with a pressure that spoke volumes, and presently she lifted her face and kissed him. Then for a while they sat silent till at last he spoke.

"Dearest, will you marry me? You know everything now, everything that I've often longed to tell you."

She quivered under the question, drawing a little closer to him.

"Gervase—you know I cannot. You know why."

He hesitated no longer, but spoke his thought aloud.

"You mean because of possible children?"

She nodded.

"Yes—and other things too."

"If you were certain, if we both agreed, we would have no children, would you marry me?"

"No, dear."

The quiet answer was like a blow in the face to him. For a moment he was silent under it, then spoke vehemently.

"Delphine, what d'you mean? Why not?"

He heard her draw her breath sharply, and felt her trembling beside him.

"Because I would never condemn any man to suffer what my father suffered," she said at last. "You, better than any one, know what that meant for him and might mean for you."

He protested with all the hot eagerness that was in him, but against the rock of her determination, entreaties and protest failed alike. In vain he argued and pleaded. She clung desperately to her resolve, how desperately he little guessed, and at last he knew himself—for the time being—beaten. Final defeat he refused to acknowledge.

The band was playing the last dance of all when they went towards the verandah where Marguerite, guessing

he had taken this opportunity to talk to Delphine, awaited them, and innumerable apologies to outraged partners and a lame explanation to follow must be Delphine's next task. As it happened it was spared her, for as they stepped on to the verandah a hospital orderly made his way through the ballroom looking for Wynnegate. Seeing him suddenly appear in the lamp-light, the man hurried up and saluted.

"Beg pardon, sir. You're wanted at the hospital—urgent. I've brought your horse."

"Good. Delphine, will you excuse me?"

"Yes, dear. You'll come to see me to-morrow?"

"As early as I can. Soon after lunch. Good-night, my darling. God bless you."

One or two couples had come out into the fresh coolness, but, regardless of them, he bent and kissed her, and glanced once at Marguerite.

"To-morrow, early," he said, and hurried off, little knowing that they were destined to meet again long before.

The next moment they heard the beat of the horse's hoofs on the hard road, and from the dance room came the strains of "God save the King." The evening was over.

Chapter XVII

IN the flower-scented drawing-room, Marguerite and Delphine were enjoying sandwiches and iced drinks before going to bed, chatting over the events of the evening and awaiting Desmond, who would shortly be in.

The sound of horse's hoofs in the quiet without startled them, and a moment later the sleepy khitmutgar ushered in Gervase. Gervase, still in mess kit, with the stern look of a man who fights the last great Enemy of all.

"Mrs. Howard, Delphine"—he looked from one to the other, and spoke abruptly, knowing the temper of the women with whom he had to deal—"I've bad news for you. Torquil is worse—so much worse that I dare not leave you till the morning without warning you."

They both rose, but neither spoke. Only Delphine's eyes questioned him further, and, coming over to her side, he took her arm.

"It's very bad, dear," he said gently. "I think, perhaps, you'd better come at once."

Very white, but quite collected, she signed an assent, and went out of the room to make a hurried change in her dress. The idea of going to her brother's death-bed, for such she knew it to be, in her dance frock was repugnant in the extreme.

Directly she had gone, Marguerite spoke.

"Captain Wynnegate, what does it mean?"

"Gangrene has set in—and it may mean the end in twenty-four hours, or two. One can't tell. It's at the top of the thigh, you see . . . there's no shadow of

hope. And if we'd been able to get the rays on to it earlier we could not only have probably saved the limb, but most certainly have saved his life."

The bitterness in his voice found its echo in Marguerite's heart, but she was too moved to say much, and they waited in silence till Delphine came back five minutes later.

"I'm ready, Gervase," she said. "Margot dear, will you come later?"

"Yes, dear," was all Marguerite could say as she kissed her, and a moment later Delphine was on her way to the hospital.

Gervase had brought a doolie, and rode beside it now, and in a very few moments the whitewashed building was reached, and Gervase took her straight to Torquil. He was still in a small room by himself, and directly Delphine entered she knew he was dying—not only by the ashen hues of the face, but by that strange chill in the air that the near approach of death seems to bring with it.

He opened his eyes as she came in and Gervase, leaning over, spoke to him.

"Delphine is here and will stay. If you want anything"—he turned to Delphine—"just call me. I shall be in the next room."

He laid his hand on her shoulder as he passed her, and left them together, Delphine fighting back unwilling tears, not wishing to disturb her brother's last hours.

Torquil stretched out his hand and felt for hers, and when she had put hers into it he smiled.

"Good of you to come," he said faintly. "Were you asleep? . . . Wynnegate oughtn't to have disturbed you at this hour."

"I wasn't asleep, dear. I hadn't gone to bed," she said, trying hard to keep her voice steady, and Torquil

nodded, looking relieved. After a moment he spoke again.

"This is—the finish, isn't it?" he asked.

She signed an answer, and his fingers tightened weakly on hers.

"Why, Delphine—you don't mean to say you're sorry?" he asked, and there was an actual sound of weak amusement in his voice. "Why, it's just the best thing that could happen! . . . It won't hurt me to talk . . . while I can. . . . Don't look anxious."

She bent suddenly and kissed him, and he smiled.

"I've been trying hard to reconcile myself to London and crutches," he said. "But . . . I couldn't . . . and then there would always have been the . . . the other thing. Thank God, things have turned out this way!"

His voice was suddenly stronger, more like its old self, and Delphine, tired and heart-broken, dropped on her knees by his bed and sobbed. He tried feebly to put his arm round her, but his weakness was momentarily increasing.

"Don't be a dear little fool," he said at last. "I'm glad, I tell you . . . glad . . . I couldn't have borne life decently, tied to crutches. . . . Don't cry, Delphine."

The effort of talking seemed to exhaust him, and after they had kissed he fell into a light doze; a doze that deepened into slumber, and when Gervase entered the room later, it was to find Delphine curled up on the floor beside the bed, her head on Torquil's pillow, her hand clasping his, and Torquil himself already passed from slumber into the unconsciousness that precedes death.

He did not wake her, knowing she would not leave her brother while any life remained, but he managed to arrange pillows for her to lean against, and just as the

pearl-hued dawn appeared in the eastern heavens
Torquil died.

One afternoon, when the northern spring was breaking over the land and the gardens of Peshawur were aglow with budding roses and scarlet hibiscus, and the fresh cool air was fragrant with the violets that still carpeted the gardens with purple under the trees, Delphine came out of the drawing-room on to the verandah and sat down where she could watch the gateway.

It was just ten days since Torquil's death, and she was more or less herself again, but very pale and very quiet, with no inclination to see anyone or do anything.

The blow of her brother's death had been severer than she had at first realised, for though they had never been close companions, the tie of kinship had been there, and of late they had evinced a mutual interest.

Added also to her natural sorrow was the burden of her own affairs. Now that her stay in India was no longer a necessity, the return was a matter of importance.

Her promise to her father held good, and she had no reason to postpone the date of her return. That return loomed up before her as a thing of nightmare proportion, for the parting with Gervase was imperative, and she had already weakened her resistance by these last days of grief and weakness.

Hard as it would have been to deny herself the joy of his love when she first returned to Peshawur, it was infinitely harder now, and she felt a sick dread of a future apart from him. Yet every day of procrastination made matters worse; already life without him was more blank and empty than imagination could picture, and her dependence on him grew more complete. A nearly sleepless night led her to her decision that the

dreaded step must be taken to-day, and a note sent to the hospital would bring him to her directly his afternoon work was over.

She had booked her passage on the next home-going P. & O. Her arrangements had been made; her father cabled; there remained only the one thing to do, and that she shrank from with every fibre of her being.

It was just four when she heard the sound of hoofs, and a moment or two later he rode into the compound and joined her as a servant led away his horse.

He guessed only too well the reason of her summons, and as he approached, Delphine saw a look on his face that meant fighting. He took her hands, cold as stone, in his, bent to kiss her, and wasting no time in preliminaries plunged into the heart of his subject.

"Dearest," he said, "I know why you've sent for me; and I have come to fight this thing out. You are going to tell me that this must be a final farewell, and that you are leaving India at once. Isn't that so?"

She looked at him in amazement.

"Gervase! How—"

"It wasn't difficult to guess," he said. "Sit down, Delphine. We've got to thrash this matter out thoroughly. You have made up your mind not to marry me, haven't you?"

Her eyes met his steadily.

"Yes," she said.

"Because you will not risk what your father risked?"

"Yes."

"It makes no difference that I take that risk with my eyes open? That I would take any risk, gladly, in heaven or earth, to call you my wife? That I love you"—his voice shook for a moment and he paused to steady it—"that I love you so deeply that nothing matters except your happiness which lies—have you not shown and told me—in my hands?"

She looked at him dumbly, and he repeated his words.

“ It makes no difference ? ”

And with dry lips she echoed them.

“ It makes no difference.”

He took the blow without wincing, and looked down at her steadily.

“ You are quite determined you will sacrifice yourself and me, that you will go home and never willingly see me again ? ”

“ Yes,” she said, and resentment at the torture of the repeated questions flashed up for one instant.

“ Oh, why do you keep repeating such things ? Are you trying to make it harder for me ? ”

“ I am trying to make it so hard that it shall be impossible,” he said. “ Are you sure that you realise, even now, what such a sacrifice will make of our two lives ? ”

“ Better than the torment indulgence might be,” she said. “ Gervase—can’t you, won’t you understand ? You are torturing me, and it is so useless. I love you with all my heart and soul, but I will not marry you.”

He turned on his heel and, walking to the end of the verandah, stood looking over the coarse grass of the lawn to the massed bushes of spring green at the further end. Not yet would he admit defeat, for he had one more weapon, and he trusted, not so much to its use in a direct blow, but in its daily insidious use.

Even so, however, absolutely as he strove to believe in its efficacy, fear knocked at his heart. Delphine had shown a tenacity of purpose with which he had not credited her, and the vague possibility of ultimate failure presented itself for the first time before him.

Right she had undoubtedly on her side; his professional experience and his own strong opinion admitted it without question—but such right mattered less than nothing. Life without her was inconceivable, and he

had enough faith in his deep love for her to believe that love was her surest protection against the doom that threatened.

Physical contact, with its weakening influence and appeal, he would not now employ. Any yielding that such might induce would not be worth the having. Spiritual, not bodily power, must give the consent, and after a little he turned and walked slowly back toward her.

"Delphine," he said, "you are counting on absence enabling you to keep your resolve. Could you keep it do you think in the face of constant meetings? Of friendship, of nearness, of community of interest which is so strong between us?"

She shrank back a little and shivered as if she feared the suggestion of his words.

"I—don't know," she said, hardly above her breath. "Why do you ask me?"

He sat down, drawing his chair close to hers and fixing his gaze on her face.

"Because that is the problem awaiting you," he said. "Dear, I am leaving India. I have resigned my commission."

He had roused her without question at last. With startled eyes and flushing cheeks she sat upright, all the languor and inertia gone from face and figure.

"Leaving India?" she echoed. "Gervase! You! What do you mean?"

"Just that," he said. "I am going home."

"Why?"

"Because I can work no more good here. Because I am hampered in what I want to do and say, by my appointment to the I.M.S., even though it is an honorary one. I want to be free. Free to act and speak, free to try at least to force the knowledge I have on the people at home. I intend to devote myself—for a time at any

rate—to writing, and after that to enter Parliament. I want to bring home to the people the grave danger into which too great officialdom is leading us. If the politicians won't hear me, the public shall. And to do that I must be free. So I am coming home."

He ceased speaking, never taking his eyes from her face, and for a minute or two she sat silent, meeting his gaze helplessly. He had indeed taken her last weapon from her, and she did not know what to do.

After a while he spoke again.

"If you can leave me, Delphine, I cannot leave you. I need you so utterly that I will go to any length to satisfy that need. So I am coming home and I shall be once more in London. My almost life-long friendship with the Princess Wanda will make our meetings possible and frequent. As for your father, I shall endeavour to put matters right. There, her Highness will help me. I will submit to humiliation even if it is necessary to clear my name in his eyes . . . and I do not think anything so extreme will be necessary. That remains, however, to be seen. What I want you to understand is this: I will not accept your decision and I will not give you up . . . because I know you"—again his voice shook—"you love me. Delphine . . . say it!"

She looked across at him where he sat leaning forward, his hands locked, his elbows resting on his knees, and saw beads of water upon his forehead belying the stern control of eyes and mouth. The sight weakened her in its unexpectedness, and with a quick intake of her breath she flung out her hands.

"Oh . . . you know it!" she said hardly above her breath, "I love you . . . I love you!"

She saw him tremble, and the fire that had leapt into his eyes misted over.

Quite suddenly he dropped his head into his hands

and sat very still, and at the sight of that dear bent head all the passion and tenderness of her heart rose in a flood that threatened to overwhelm her. Desperately her hands locked on to the cane arms of her chair lest they went out to draw that beloved head to her breast. She must not, she could not yield. If she weakened now it was all useless, the pain and the struggle; all to bear and fight over again. His weakness, however, was but the thing of a moment, yet as he lifted his head and she saw his look, it seemed that she could not bear what she had forced upon herself. His mouth was steady, he had regained his normal control, but his eyes were wet and he took out his handkerchief and passed it across them with neither shame nor embarrassment. The deep things of the spirit held them both and his emotion needed no excuse.

"At least we know now how we stand," he said after a moment. "It is an open fight. Mrs. Howard tells me she is taking you home and will stay two months, so I have booked my passage by the same boat. The sooner I get home the better; the work is urgent, and out here I can do no more. Now I am going."

He rose as he spoke and took her hand in his.

"Now and always, God bless you, darling," he said very low, and stooping before she could draw back, kissed her lips.

Chapter XVIII

“ Is her Highness in ?”

The manservant opened the door widely and drew back.

“ I believe so, m’sieur. I will inquire.”

Gervase took out his card.

“ Please take my card up to her and ask her if she will see me,” he said.

The servant, who was elderly and obviously a Frenchman, opened another door.

“ Will you be pleased to wait in here, m’sieur ?” he said. “ I will acquaint her Highness.”

He ushered Gervase into a small room and left him, and Gervase strolled across to the fire, studying his surroundings with deep interest.

Princess Wanda Tonelli’s house was in Charles Street, and the room into which he had been shown was a small apartment, the walls covered with stained grey silk, the furniture formal with the exquisite formality of the sixteenth Louis; a small, severe, yet beautiful place, its only ornament besides the actual furniture being in the two great branches of pale hot-house lilac that stood in tall cut-glass vases, the delicate blue-mauve toning with the pale grey of the walls.

He had barely time to appreciate the severity of the room before the old servant appeared in the doorway.

“ Will m’sieur please to come upstairs ?” he said with his little foreign bow, and led the way up softly carpeted stairs to a room on the first floor, a wide, low

room, softly carpeted and lit by amber-shaded lights, a room all fresh fragrance from the many flowers and filled with beautiful things.

Princess Wanda was standing on the hearth as he entered, one arm stretched along the mantelpiece in an attitude of waiting—that gave way suddenly to a very charming smile of welcome as he was announced.

“Gervase! After all these years!”

She extended her hands, and he would have kissed them in orthodox greeting, but instead she caught his.

“My dear Gervase!” she repeated, and offered her cheek.

Flushing a little he saluted her, and with a smile she seated herself and signed him to do the same.

“I received your telephone message, and I am delighted to see you again,” she said. “My very dear friend, welcome home.”

He replied as suitably as he could, for he was deeply moved by the sweet sincerity of her greeting, and gave her his warmest wishes for her happiness.

She replied, accepting them with a faint heightening of the colour in her cheeks, and moved to another chair to give him tea; during which they talked at random of a dozen subjects of mutual interest. When she had drank hers and lit a cigarette, however, she put aside the trivialities of their conversation.

“*Mon cher* Gervase, you did not come here, I think, only to talk of my affairs,” she said, “but to tell me, I hope, of your own. You look worn and ill, *mon ami*, and there is trouble in your eyes. You once did me the honour of trusting me with your affairs. Will you not renew it?”

He moved suddenly, drawing back a little in his big chair so that his face was partly in shadow.

“It is—a long story, Princess,” he said. “I am afraid it may weary you.”

She smiled, her eyes on the dancing flames of the wood fire.

"I have kept this hour free for you," she said.
"Will you not put me to the test?"

He made a mute sign of assent, but still sat silent till she looked across at him, smiling a little.

"It is—the one woman, is it not?" she asked, and meeting her glance he had to smile in return, but his voice was grave and very low.

"Yes, Princess . . . but there is much to tell you first. Will you hear me without comment, right to the end? I want you to know everything before you judge me—as judge you must."

There was a pain in his voice that chased the gentle amusement from her eyes; leaning back in her chair she threw away her cigarette and took up a fan painted by Boucher, to shield her face from the fire, waving it very gently and to fro.

"Proceed, *mon ami*," she said quietly, and as quietly he began to speak. It was indeed a long story, and he hid nothing and spared himself nothing; he told her of the first meeting with Mrs. Molyneux—and at the mention of her name the Princess's fan ceased its gentle rhythmic movement for a brief instant—of the tragic development of his folly and conceit; of the years in India, and of his meeting with Delphine. That last was more difficult. He found it anything but easy to speak of his love for her, or of her repeated refusal to marry him. But he did so, convincingly enough to the woman who listened. Presently the Princess asked a question.

"She refuses because she is her mother's daughter?"

"Yes. If it were only Sir Hugh's opposition—well, I should endeavour to convince him that my only fault was self-conceit and unwisdom."

She made a gesture of assent.

"Yes. You probably could," she said. "Yet I don't know. You say he has told Delphine why you left London?"

"Yes. She knows both his side of the matter and mine. Has known it for two years. I imagine Sir Hugh is still very bitterly disposed towards me, but we are neither of us children, Delphine and I, and if he refused his final consent we should have to do without it."

"That is so. But it would be a pity."

There was a long silence after she spoke, and it was broken by an unexpected occurrence. The door opened and a manservant announced:

"Sir Hugh Molyneux."

The Princess paused very slightly as if to consider the unexpected position, then she rose to greet her lover, holding out her hand for him to salute. He kissed it, then raising his head saw Wynnegate on the further side of the hearth. For a moment the silence was tense, and the two men's glances challenged and held; then Princess Wanda spoke in a clear deliberate voice.

"Hugh," she said, "Mr. Gervase Wynnegate is known to you. This is not the moment, nor is it necessary for me to defend any action of his that you may have misjudged in the past. What I do wish to tell you is that for fourteen years he has been my valued and honoured friend, and as such I ask you to meet him."

Gervase flung one look at her and smiled very slightly. Then Molyneux bowed; and as their eyes met once again, into the mind of either man flashed the memory of their last meeting—a memory unspeakably bitter to both.

It was Gervase who spoke first.

"Princess, if you will permit me I will go," he said.

"I have an engagement at six-thirty that I must not break."

"I am pleased you were able to come to-day," she said. "Do not forget you are dining with me next Thursday at eight-thirty. *Au revoir, Gervase.*"

She smiled, watched him bow to Molyneux, and heard the latter's brief good-night, then he had gone and she turned to her lover.

"Hugh," she said, "that was an unexpected meeting for which I am glad. . . . Will you sit down here beside me, for I want to talk to you? You are angry, my dearest, and I can understand, but before you speak let me say what is in my heart."

She was very lovely, very gracious, and he was before all things a courteous gentleman; so he sat down beside her on the low couch and listened, making no sign—only when she laid her left hand on his, he clasped it close in his own.

She spoke briefly and with great conciseness, for she wished him to understand very clearly how matters stood. What she did not tell him was the fact of Wynnegate's love for Delphine—the time for that was not yet.

He heard her in the silence for which she had asked, and at the conclusion looked at her gravely.

"I cannot doubt your judgment, Wanda," he said, "but you are asking me a hard thing—the hardest possible."

She met his look with a glance as straight as his own.

"Do you really believe Gervase Wynnegate wished to be your wife's lover?" she asked.

He attempted no excuse, for with her he was absolutely sincere and his pride ceased to be his god.

"For many years I believed it," he said. "My

sister has in these last few weeks shaken that belief. I do not change my opinions easily, and I admit I am perplexed. If Wynnegate spoke the truth that night, his only fault was folly—the folly as you say of youth and ambition. But did he? Wanda, must we discuss this matter. May not so painful an incident be forgotten?"

Her fingers tightened on his with a sudden grip as of desperation, for which neither her words nor subject seemed to account.

"Dear heart, we must. Don't ask me why just now. If you are perplexed so am I, and very shortly I will tell you the reason. All that is necessary for me now is to convince you, absolutely to convince you, that Gervase Wynnegate is and has always been an honourable gentleman. I do not vouch for many of my friends, Hugh, but I do for him."

"You are very fond of him?"

"I respect and like him. Incidentally I owe my life to his skill and care . . . years ago, not long before he left England. Even—even Pasquale"—her tone froze at the mention of her dead husband—"even Pasquale respected him—and respect was foreign to such a nature as his."

"What do you wish me to do if I endeavour to withdraw my condemnation?"

"To meet him when the occasion demands. To watch and know him. To put aside all prejudice, and to keep, for three months, all judgment suspended. At the end of those three months I will tell you why I have begged you to do this—why my heart is set on your acknowledging you were mistaken—and with every apparent reason to believe you were not. Can you do this for me?"

He knew her too well to doubt her, loved her too truly not to be able to forgo even his pride for her

sake. They had both risen, and now he bent and kissed her hands.

"Is there anything in heaven or earth I will not do for you, my darling?" he said very low. "Have your own dear way."

Chapter XIX

THE news that Gervase Wynnegate was going to contest the next vacant Unionist seat came as no surprise to Delphine or to Princess Wanda. The three months that had passed since his return to England had been well spent, and his determination had strengthened—the determination to force, if humanly possible, the importance of medical and surgical matters in India on the mind and attention of the great public—and Parliament would give him the chance he wanted.

His former standing as a surgeon would give him the authority to speak, and the first-hand experience of his latter years would be invaluable in the fight that must ensue. He began his campaign by an article in the *Nineteenth Century* that attracted a good deal of attention, following it up by several others in various reviews of note. Then he was asked to address an important meeting before the British Society of Medicine, and finally, a vacancy occurring in one of the southern constituencies, he was put forward as an Imperialist candidate.

For the stereotyped political point of view he had nothing but contempt, and his opinions as put forth to the members of his committee were original enough both to capture and alienate votes in no small degree. Delphine, unknowing that he had spoken of her to Princess Wanda, found a strong supporter of the man she loved where she least expected it, and greatly to her surprise noted her father's absence of comment upon the matter. Wynnegate's views had already attracted a good deal of attention, and the approach-

ing election at Altonbury filled more than a few minds with unrest.

Easter falling early that year, the Princess and Hugh Molyneux were married during the first fortnight in March, and spent a month at the former's palazzo in Venice, returning to London at the end of April to the house Molyneux had taken in Berkeley Square, for neither of them wished to stay in the homes that were associated—strangely enough in both cases—with great unhappiness.

Delphine spent the time chiefly at Charters, Bruce Molyneux's Sussex house, for she was not at all well, and country air was considered best for her.

She was looking white and tired despite the quiet weeks she had spent, when she returned to London to welcome the bride and bridegroom; Lady Cynthia put it down to the warm spring days, but Princess Wanda knew better. There was a look about Delphine that she did not like, an inertia all the more noticeable by reason of the wonderful vitality that it had replaced. She looked her twenty-nine years, and there were fine little lines about her eyes and a patience that hurt the Princess, in the eyes themselves.

For five weeks she herself had lived in paradise—a paradise that stretched on into the infinite distance; perhaps it had quickened her already keen perceptions. At all events, watching her stepdaughter at intervals during the first few days after their arrival in town—days and nights filled to the last minute with gay and brilliant happenings—she came to a decision.

It was not an easy one. It brought the shadow of tragedy and bitter suffering back to a life that had already known too much of both; but love had taught self-sacrifice, and the Princess was a woman capable of learning a hard lesson.

Delphine's affection had ripened to a deep love; she felt her stepmother's irresistible attraction in no small degree and rejoiced in her gracious dignity and charm. Day by day that charm grew, and in its sunshine, Hugh Molyneux thanked God for life, and Delphine realised that beneath the rank and breeding of the very great lady her father loved was the heart of a generous and splendid woman.

Of Gervase she saw little, but enough to make her suffer, and suffer she did, all the more acutely because such pain must be hidden from everyone in the world. Gervase himself did not make matters easier, for he was feeling the strain acutely, and their meetings served but to intensify their mutual discomfort. Delphine had begun to experience a new torment and—with regard to her mother's fate—a very terrible one; it took the form of severe headache beginning with intense mental depression as though the nerves were overshadowed by the premonition of dreadful pain to come. These headaches were so severe that they were almost unbearable, and Delphine dreaded them to such an extent that anticipation of their coming amounted almost to an obsession, and was enough in itself to account for her nervous exhaustion. Imagination tortured her, leading her through a future of horror, a future when she, too, would be as her mother—insane. And when at last she faced the dreadful word she would have to fight to crush back the shriek of terror that rose in her throat.

These attacks did not come at present very often; sometimes for a fortnight she was free and able to sleep; then one morning it might be, or at some hour of the day—preferably when she was physically tired—a feeling of black depression would come over her spirits, apprehension would soon add its quota of discomfort, and a sense of almost breathless tension which

only left her when the first white-hot thrill of pain stabbed through her brain.

From then onward there was nothing to do but suffer, bearing it as best she might.

Lady Cynthia coming up to spend a couple of nights in town, arrived at Berkeley Square for luncheon, and was horrified at her niece's appearance.

She spoke of it to her brother-in-law, and he looked along the table at his daughter with sudden anxiety. Delphine was talking to her neighbour, a young secretary at the French Embassy. He could look at her unobserved.

It was a glorious day with an unclouded sky and hot sun, and Delphine wore a white cloth frock that added to her pallor. Even as her father watched she ceased speaking, and as her neighbour's attention was for the moment taken by the woman on his other side, Delphine's slender figure relaxed and she leant back in her chair as if too weary for continued effort. But it was not the weariness that impressed Molyneux so unpleasantly; it was the curious lifeless look on the face that had always been so vivid, the loss of youth in its lines.

Lady Cynthia's voice interrupted his painful thoughts.

"Hugh, she's ill—really ill. If you don't want a collapse find out what it is."

It was seldom anything disturbed Cynthia's serenity and he turned a worried face towards her.

"What's wrong?" he said. "I can see there is something. D'you really think it's serious?"

"So serious that if you don't act promptly your action will be too late. She looks as if she had received sentence of death. For God's sake, Hugh, find out!"

They were driving down to Hurlingham in the afternoon, and attending a big political dinner party; after

the dinner there was a ball at the Duchess of Wray's, at which they were expected, and there did not seem to be much leisure in which to carry out Cynthia's request. Yet it had alarmed him in no small degree, and what he had seen alarmed him still more. Directly an opportunity occurred he spoke to his wife of Cynthia's words. It was the opportunity she had been waiting for.

"Hugh—I cannot go to the ball. I shall telephone Elizabeth"—Elizabeth was the Duchess—"and explain I am not well. I must talk to you about Delphine."

His fears were receiving confirmation rather than alleviation, but there was nothing to be done at present except to wait with what patience he might for the promised interview.

Gervase Wynnegate was among the guests at the dinner, and afterwards Molyneux found himself drawn into argument opposing him. Not a position he would have wished for, but which he had to fill.

Wynnegate spoke frankly. The state of European affairs was highly unsatisfactory, India had barely sufficient medical personnel and equipment for herself, and in case she had ever to send out an expeditionary force, the usefulness of that force would be nullified by reason of its inability to look after its well-being in the field.

Modern medical and surgical equipment meant the saving of life, and life was above all things the most valuable in a country and an empire which did not conscript its man-power. The British people were sound at heart, but they were incredibly stupid and required kicking into action.

"You admit they act well when danger arises?" someone questioned with a hardly veiled sneer.

"Certainly. But is that a virtue? Surely most men

are capable of acting decently in face of danger ? Fear alone will prevent the larger number of them doing anything else."

General Freer, who was present, leaned forward and studied Wynnegate for a moment, then spoke.

" You suggest that the leaders of the people are at fault in not rousing them ?"

Wynnegate met his eyes.

" Yes. Don't you ?"

" H'm. I don't think so. We've a strong navy and we're not a military nation."

" That's just it. Other nations are. And if we ever awaken before we're destroyed, and train our men, one of the essential things will be the need for modern science in healing."

" What's wrong with the R.A.M.C. ?"

" Nothing, perhaps, that it can avoid—the fault lies behind. England doesn't care for science—she admits the necessity grudgingly enough that ships must have modern guns, that flying may be more than a risky form of amusement for reckless and wealthy young men. But she doesn't admit that scientific research costs money. She's pleased if yellow fever or sleeping sickness can be stamped out in her unhealthier colonies, she approves of efforts to obtain valuable antitoxins that may save life on the battle-field, but she regards it all as a thing outside the essential life of the nation. Parliament would vote for a grant to build sufficient schools for the children of the poor, but it wouldn't vote a penny—left to itself—for light treatment apparatus, the latest instruments, and rare drugs, to save those children when they fall dangerously ill. Don't you see the inconsistency ?"

" You hope to make both the public and its representatives awake to this necessity ?" Molyneux inquired suddenly. " Do you think you'll succeed ?"

At the sound of his voice, Wynnegate turned and looked at him.

"I don't allow myself to think of failure," he said.
"Anticipation is going half-way to meet it."

Molyneux nodded.

"Your chief interest lies in the matter when it touches the army?"

"Naturally—and the Indian Army in particular. I am certain that if people once realised the huge importance of this matter, they would insist on national support for scientific medical research as they do for education."

The argument continued for a little, then became more strictly political; General Freer and several of the older men regarding Wynnegate as a dangerous man with reactionary views, having contempt for authority as it stood and possessing no respect for official procedure.

Wynnegate himself cared little. He expected opposition; expected resentment and bitter dislike. The question of old could still be addressed to those who endeavoured to awaken the people to the sense of their danger.

"By what authority doest thou these things?"

He left rather early, but not till after Princess Wanda and her husband had gone, and went straight home to his flat in the Albany, for he had enough writing to keep him busy for several hours.

Meanwhile in the house in Berkeley Square, Princess Wanda faced facts as Delphine had done in Kala Ismail Khan.

"Hugh," she said, "do you remember what I asked you three months ago?"

Molyneux looked across at her where she stood, leaning on the mantelpiece, a tall, gracious figure in her long gown of heavy blue brocade.

“I remember,” he said, “and you told me you would give me your reason for that request.”

“That is what I want to do, now. And that reason is urgent. Delphine is ill.”

“Delphine? What has Delphine to do with it?”

“Everything. Delphine is ill because she and Gervase Wynnegate are in love with one another. Have been for nearly four years. That is why I wished you to blot out your condemnation of Gervase Wynnegate.”

Molyneux laid aside the cigarette he was about to light and stood facing his wife, his tall figure rigid.

“I guessed it from Marguerite, but how did you learn this?”

“From Gervase himself. It happened when Delphine went out to Kala Ismail Khan.”

“You wished me to give my consent? Yet neither Delphine nor Wynnegate have asked for it.”

“Gervase might have done so had Delphine permitted it—she would not.”

“Why?”

She was silent for a moment, and her arm that rested along the edge of the high shelf stiffened; a stiffening that seemed to affect her whole figure. When the silence grew significant she spoke very quietly.

“Because she believes herself to be unfit to marry.”

Hugh Molyneux uttered a stifled exclamation; without heeding it Princess Wanda went on.

“There is the central point of the whole matter,” she said. “It is necessary that Delphine is told the truth.”

“Wanda!”

All the rigid pride gone from him he started forward, hands outflung to her, face white; and into her face the blood crept in a flush of painful beauty. She did not

take his hands, but stretching out her right rang the bell by her side.

"I am going to tell her," she said.

Molyneux dropped back. When the footman answered the bell a moment later he had recovered his customary composure, though had anyone been near enough to observe they might have seen his hands were clenched on the chair-back to hide their shaking.

"If Miss Delphine has not gone to bed, will you ask her to come here?"

Princess Wanda's voice was quite steady; the colour had died out of her face, but her eyes glowed as if with some inward fire; and in the silence that ensued as they waited, Hugh Molyneux watched her with hungry eyes.

They did not have to wait long. Delphine, unable to sleep, was reading in her room, and came down at once on receiving the message—a slender weary figure in a loose gown. As she entered she glanced in some surprise from one to the other.

"You wanted me at once, didn't you?" she said. "So please forgive my not waiting to dress again."

"Yes, dear. Sit down. I have something to tell you."

She looked at her stepmother, who moved to a chair, thinking, like her father, how very much the Princess was in evidence to-night, and dropped on to a couch.

"I am listening," she said. "What is it?"

Princess Wanda did not reply immediately, and surprised at the long silence, she looked at her father. To her amazement, Hugh Molyneux had turned his back and stood leaning his elbows on the mantelshelf, where his wife had been standing, resting his head on his hand.

That attitude told her something tragic was afoot, and her fears flew to Gervase.

"What is it?" she repeated, and there was a sudden sharp anxiety in her voice.

Molyneux neither spoke nor moved, but Princess Wanda came and sat down on the couch beside her.

"Delphine—why have you so persistently refused to marry Gervase Wynnegate?"

The question seemed cruel, even to Princess Wanda, but she had her reason for asking it—her husband must realise that the critical situation was not of her making.

To Delphine it was almost as if she had struck her a physical blow. Her face crimsoned, then went white till the lips themselves were blanched. Twice she tried to speak, and her dry throat refused to utter a sound; then with a gesture of despair she flung out her hands.

"I—I—is it possible I could do anything else? Why do you ask me?"

The elder woman's face was almost as pale, but her composure was unshaken.

"Because it is necessary that I know."

It was Delphine's turn to be silent, as she struggled for self-command; to her this abrupt question was like the stripping of an open wound. Resentment flared into anger, anger against the man who stood by in silence and let her be hurt so unbearably, and her anger steadied her and allowed her to speak.

"I think my father is the person who can best answer your question," she said. "He knows my mother's inheritance is not one to be handed on."

Molyneux swung round at her words, and Delphine's eyes met his.

"I am not fit to marry," she said. "And you know why, better perhaps than I do."

He opened his lips to speak, but Princess Wanda forestalled him.

"That is why I sent for you," she said, and her voice was level yet curiously vibrant. "Delphine—you are fit to marry anyone you choose. You are not Enid Molyneux's daughter. You are mine."

Chapter XX

SLOWLY, out of the depths of soundless darkness, Delphine struggled back to the light and movement of life like a sleeper awaking from some dream, to realise that she was lying on the couch with the taste of brandy in her mouth and the chill of water about her forehead.

Molyneux stood close by, but it was Princess Wanda who knelt at her side, her eyes dark with anxiety, her fingers on her wrist, and Delphine, forcing her will to its work, tried to speak.

“ Is it——”

Molyneux interrupted her.

“ Don’t talk for a few moments—you fainted.”

But Princess Wanda was wiser, for she knew the storm of conflicting emotions that must rise in Delphine’s mind, and, bending down, she smoothed the hair away from the wet forehead.

“ It is quite true. You did not imagine it. When you feel able to listen just tell me and you shall hear all you want to know. Don’t hurry. Wait till the faintness has gone.”

“ It has gone now—enough to listen,” Delphine said unsteadily. “ I must understand. Father——”

Molyneux came swiftly to her.

“ Yes, dear—Wanda, let me tell her. You have suffered enough.”

He put his arm round his wife and, drawing her to her feet, held her close for an instant, and then releasing her, drew up a chair.

“ Sit down,” he said. “ Delphine shall know everything.”

Delphine, still dazed a little by her faintness, stretched

out a hand, and he took it and held it close as he sat down beside her.

"It is not a long story," he said. "Lie still and listen. You asked me nearly three years ago about my marriage—whether I knew of the state of my wife's health. D'you remember?"

Delphine nodded, and he went on.

"I told you then that it was not till after Torquil's birth that the knowledge came to me. It was actually three months before. You may imagine what it meant then. And Enid never forgave me for being the cause of her having a child. She was bitterly resentful—the months of discomfort and enforced quiet—the suffering—she hated it all, and when Torquil was born she hated me. We had some painful scenes, and in the end we agreed to live as strangers. She was incapable of either love or affection, and I think I was the same then. She had poisoned my life—worse still, she had poisoned my son's, and if she hated me, I also hated her. I went that winter to Davos for a few weeks and while I was there . . ." he paused a moment and his eyes sought his wife's, "I met Princess Wanda Batavsky. That was nearly thirty years ago. We fell in love. I make no excuse. I was a married man and she was a girl of only twenty-three, but we were swept into a vortex that proved too strong for us. For one brief week there was no duty or honour or fear—there was nothing but our love for one another. Then the Princess went on to Italy. A month or two later we met in Rome. She told me she was going to have a child. She was young and very wealthy, and already the ruler of her small state. We made necessary arrangements. They were not really difficult. It was settled that later—when it was imperative—she should leave Poland and stay in a house that I took for her in Catania. After the child was born it was to be placed in the care of a

friend the Princess could trust—who died soon after. One thing the Princess insisted on, I should tell my wife the truth."

He paused to moisten his dry lips, and Delphine's fingers tightened on his, but she did not speak.

"I went back to town and did as I had promised. Enid heard me with little or no animosity. She appeared supremely indifferent to my conduct now that we no longer lived as man and wife. Just at the time of the expected birth I was offered the Governorship of Ceylon. Before I decided I travelled straight to Catania and saw—the woman I loved. She advised me to accept. The child was three weeks old, and on the day she left for Poland, expecting she would soon see her baby again in a few weeks at most in Paris where your guardian was living, I travelled back to London with the child in my care, stopping at Paris on the way. You were given into her charge. When I arrived in London Enid announced her intention of accompanying me to Ceylon if I saw fit to accept the post. When I had done so she informed me she wished to say something to me about my own affairs. I listened—I had wronged her deeply, and the least I could do was to agree to anything she might propose. I was not prepared for the proposal, however. She had considered the confession I had made, so she said, and her reply to it was this: you were to be brought up as her daughter, and not to be told of your parentage. Our immediate departure for Ceylon would enable any difficulties to be solved as regards the details of the date of your birth. I was amazed at her suggestion—bewildered, deeply moved. Such an arrangement was painful in its generosity. Also, I knew it would be impossible for—for your mother to endure. I said so—telling her at the same time what my depths of shame and gratitude were. Her attitude was characteristic.

Her offer was not forgiveness but revenge . . . the price of her silence.

“ Either I acceded to this arrangement or she published the truth of your motherhood. It is not necessary for me to point out to you what such a thing would have meant. The Princess was by reason of her youth and rank a well-known figure in European society. . . . There are sins that are never forgiven to women. Acting for her sake, I gave Enid the promise she required.

“ Wanda and I met once more. When we sailed for Ceylon it was arranged that you should travel out in Marguerite’s care by the next boat.

“ Enid’s plan worked as she had known it would. You may imagine what it meant to me to see you in her charge—to know you so subtly used as a weapon—to feel you as an ever-present instrument of her hatred of me. . . . We had been in Ceylon four years when the news came that Russia had annexed some small Polish states, amongst them Princess Wanda’s. Two years later came the news of her marriage to an Italian diplomatist, Pasquale Tonelli.

“ From Ceylon I went to China, as you know. Then my health broke down for a time. I had to come home. Princess Wanda and I exchanged one letter a year. We did not meet till that night last autumn when you were present.”

He ceased speaking and leant back in his chair, realising now that the recital was ended that he was fifty-five years old and had lived strenuously.

It was Delphine who broke the silence that had fallen on the room.

“ Then—I am free——”

And it was Princess Wanda who understood all that those stammered words expressed. Rising, she came over to the two she loved.

"Quite free," she said, and, bending down, put her arm around her daughter.

"Delphine," she said, and for the first time her voice broke, "can you forgive me?"

Half an hour later Delphine lay alone in the cool dimness of her bedroom. Sleep had never been further from her, yet she felt neither fatigue nor disturbance. A peace such as she had never before felt enfolded her, soothing the long strain of nerves and brain, calming fear, answering the questions that had tormented all the years since her lonely childhood. A faint breeze sucked gently at the blind of her window, and behind the thin silk curtains the soft hue of dawn outlined the window itself as a square of dim light in the darkness of the room.

Minute by minute the light strengthened, and the sweet freshness of the morning crept in through the wide-open sash. A bird chirped in the old plane trees, and from the further side of the square came the rattle of a milk-cart. All the ordinary cheerful sounds of renewed life were beginning anew, and in the quiet air the rumble of the later fruit and vegetable carts coming in from the country could be heard in Piccadilly.

Delphine lay very straight and quiet, her gaze on that softly lit window, her lips smiling a little. Presently, when the first shaft of the sunlight was gilding the tops of the plane trees in the square, she turned over, pillow'd her cheek in her hand, and slept.



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 135 244 2

